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THE LITTLE MINISTER.

THE LITTLE MINISTER.

BY

J. M. BARRIE.

In Three Volumes.

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SAUVAGE

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THE

LITTLE MINISTER.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MINISTER DANCES TO THE WOMAN'S PIPING.

Gavin let the doctor's warnings fall in the grass. In his joy over Nanny's deliverance he jumped the garden gate, whose hinges were of yarn, and cleverly caught his hat as it was leaving his head in protest. He then re-entered the mud house staidly. Pleasant was the change. Nanny's home was as a clock that had been run out, and is set going again. Already the old woman was unpacking her box, to increase the distance between herself and the poorhouse. But Gavin only saw her in the background, for the Egyptian, singing at her work, had become the heart of the house. She had flung her shawl over

Nanny's shoulders, and was at the fireplace breaking peats with the leg of a stool. She turned merrily to the minister to ask him to chop up his staff for firewood, and he would have answered wittily but could not. Then, as often, the beauty of the Egyptian surprised him into silence. I could never get used to her face myself in the after-days. It has always held me wondering, like my own Glen Quharity on a summer day, when the sun is lingering and the clouds are on the march, and the glen is never the same for two minutes, but always so beautiful as to make me sad. Never will I attempt to picture the Egyptian as she seemed to Gavin while she bent over Nanny's fire, never will I describe my glen. Yet a hundred times have I hankered after trying to picture both.

An older minister, believing that Nanny's anguish was ended, might have gone on his knees and finished the interrupted prayer, but now Gavin was only doing this girl's bidding.

"Nanny and I are to have a dish of tea, as soon as we have set things to rights," she told him. "Do you think we should invite the minister, Nanny?"

"We couldna dare," Nanny answered quickly. "You'll excuse her, Mr. Dishart, for the presumption?"

"Presumption!" said the Egyptian, making a face.

"Lassie," Nanny said, fearful to offend her new friend, yet horrified at this affront to the minister, "I ken you mean weel, but Mr. Dishart 'll think you're putting yoursel' on an equality wi' him." She added in a whisper, "Dinna be so free; he's the Auld Licht minister."

The gypsy bowed with mock awe, but Gavin let it pass. He had, indeed, forgotten that he was anybody in particular, and was anxious to stay to tea.

"But there is no water," he remembered, "and is there any tea?"

"I am going out for them and for some other things," the Egyptian explained. "But no," she continued, reflectively, "if I go for the tea, you must go for the water."

"Lassie," cried Nanny, "mind wha you're speaking to. To send a minister to the well!"

"I will go," said Gavin, recklessly lifting the pitcher. "The well is in the wood, I think?"

"Gie me the pitcher, Mr. Dishart," said Nanny, in distress. "What a town there would be if you was seen wi't!"

"Then he must remain here and keep the house till we come back," said the Egyptian, and thereupon departed, with a friendly wave of her hand to the minister.

"She's an awfu' lassie," Nanny said, apologetically, "but it'll just be the way she has been brought up."

"She has been very good to you, Nanny."

"She has; leastwise, she promises to be.

Mr. Dishart, she's awa'; what if she doesna come back?"

Nanny spoke nervously, and Gavin drew a long face.

"I think she will," he said faintly. "I am confident of it," he added in the same voice.

"And has she the siller?"

"I believe in her," said Gavin, so doggedly that his own words reassured him. "She has an excellent heart."

"Ay," said Nanny, to whom the minister's faith was more than the Egyptian's promise, "and that's hardly natural in a gaćn-aboot body. Yet a gypsy she maun be, for naebody would pretend to be ane that wasna. Tod, she proved she was an Egyptian by dauring to send you to the well."

This conclusive argument brought her prospective dower so close to Nanny's eyes that it hid the poorhouse.

"I suppose she'll gie you the money," she

said, "and syne you'll gie me the seven shillings a-week?"

"That seems the best plan," Gavin answered.

"And what will you gie it me in?" Nanny asked, with something on her mind. "I would be terrible obliged if you gae it to me in saxpences."

"Do the smaller coins go farther?" Gavin asked, curiously.

"Na, it's no that. But I've heard tell o' folk giving away half-crowns by mistake for twa-shilling bits; ay, and there's something dizzying in ha'en fower-and-twenty pennies in one piece; it has sic terrible little bulk. Sanders had ainee a gold sovereign, and he looked at it so often that it seemed to grow smaller and smaller in his hand till he was feared it micht just be a half after all."

Her mind relieved on this matter, the old woman set off for the well. A minute afterwards Gavin went to the door to look for

the gypsy, and, behold, Nanny was no further than the gate. Have you who read ever been sick near to death, and then so far recovered that you could once again stand at your window? If so, you have not forgotten how the beauty of the world struck you afresh, so that you looked long and said many times, "How fair a world it is!" like one who had made a discovery. It was such a look that Nanny gave to the hill and Caddam while she stood at her garden gate.

Gavin returned to the fire and watched a girl in it in an officer's cloak playing at hide and seek with soldiers. After a time he sighed, then looked round sharply to see who had sighed, then, absent-mindedly, lifted the empty kettle and placed it on the glowing peats. He was standing glaring at the kettle, his arms folded, when Nanny returned from the well.

"I've been thinking," she said, "o' something that proves the lassie to be just an Egyptian. Ay, I noticed she wasna nane awed

when I said you was the Auld Licht minister. Weel, I'se uphaud that came frae her living ower muckle in the open air. Is there no' a smell o' burning in the house?"

"I have noticed it," Gavin answered, sniffing, "since you came in. I was busy until then, putting on the kettle. The smell is becoming worse."

Nanny had seen the empty kettle on the fire as he began to speak, and so solved the mystery. Her first thought was to snatch the kettle out of the blaze, but remembering who had put it there, she dared not. She siddled toward the hearth instead, and saying craftily, "Ay, here it is; it's a clout among the peats," softly laid the kettle on the earthen floor. It was still red with sparks, however, when the gypsy reappeared.

"Who burned the kettle?" she asked, ignoring Nanny's signs.

"Lassie," Nanny said, "it was me;" but Gavin, flushing, confessed his guilt.

"Oh, you stupid!" exclaimed the Egyptian, shaking her two ounces of tea (which then cost six shillings the pound) in his face.

At this Nanny wrung her hands, crying, "That's waur than swearing."

"If men," said the gypsy, severely, "would keep their hands in their pockets all day, the world's affairs would be more easily managed."

"Wheesht!" cried Nanny, "if Mr. Dishart cared to set his mind to it, he could make the kettle boil quicker than you or me. But his thochts is on higher things."

"No higher than this," retorted the gypsy, holding her hand level with her brow. "Confess, Mr. Dishart, that this is the exact height of what you were thinking about. See, Nanny, he is blushing as if I meant that he had been thinking about me. He cannot answer, Nanny: we have found him out."

"And kindly of him it is no to answer," said

Nanny, who had been examining the gypsy's various purchases; "for what could he answer, except that he would need to be sure o' living a thousand years afore he could spare five minutes on you or me? Of course it would be different if we sat under him."

"And yet," said the Egyptian, with great solemnity, "he is to drink tea at that very table. I hope you are sensible of the honour, Nanny."

"Am I no?" said Nanny, whose education had not included sarcasm. "I'm trying to keep frae thinking o't till he's gone, in case I should let the teapot fall."

"You have nothing to thank me for, Nanny," said Gavin, "but much for which to thank this—this——"

"This haggarty-taggarty Egyptian," suggested the girl. Then, looking at Gavin curiously, she said, "But my name is Babbie."

"That's short for Barbara," said Nanny; "but Babbie what?"

"Yes, Babbie Watt," replied the gypsy, as if one name were as good as another.

"Weel, then, lift the lid off the kettle, Babbie," said Nanny, "for it's boiling ower."

Gavin looked at Nanny with admiration and envy, for she had said Babbie as coolly as if it was the name of a pepper-box.

Babbie tucked up her sleeves to wash Nanny's cups and saucers, which even in the most prosperous days of the mud house had only been in use once a week, and Gavin was so eager to help that he bumped his head on the plate-rack.

"Sit there," said Babbie, authoritatively, pointing, with a cup in her hand, to a stool, "and don't rise till I give you permission."

To Nanny's amazement, he did as he was bid.

"I got the things in the little shop you told me of," the Egyptian continued, addressing the mistress of the house, "but the horrid man would not give them to me until he had seen my money."

"Enoch would be suspicious o' you," Nanny explained, "you being an Egyptian."

"Ah," said Babbie, with a side-glance at the minister, "I am only an Egyptian. Is that why you dislike me, Mr. Dishart?"

Gavin hesitated foolishly over his answer, and the Egyptian, with a towel round her waist, made a pretty gesture of despair.

"He neither likes you nor dislikes you," Nanny explained; "you forget he's a minister."

"That is what I cannot endure," said Babbie, putting the towel to her eyes, "to be neither liked nor disliked. Please hate me, Mr. Dishart, if you cannot lo—ove me."

Her face was behind the towel, and Gavin could not decide whether it was the face or the towel that shook with agitation. He gave Nanny a look that asked, "Is she really crying?" and Nanny telegraphed back, "I question it."

"Come, come," said the minister, gallantly, "I did not say that I disliked you."

Even this desperate compliment had not the desired effect, for the gypsy continued to sob behind her screen.

"I can honestly say," went on Gavin, as solemnly as if he were making a statement in a court of justice, "that I like you."

Then the Egyptian let drop her towel, and replied with equal solemnity:

"Oh, tank oo! Nanny, the minister says me is a dood 'ittle dirl."

"He didna gang that length," said Nanny, sharply, to cover Gavin's confusion. "Set the things, Babbie, and I'll make the tea."

The Egyptian obeyed demurely, pretending to wipe her eyes every time Gavin looked at her. He frowned at this, and then she affected to be too overcome to go on with her work.

"Tell me, Nanny," she asked presently, "what sort of man this Enoch is, from whom I bought the things?"

"He is not very regular, I fear," answered

Gavin, who felt that he had sat silent and self-conscious on his stool too long.

"Do you mean that he drinks?" asked Babbie.

"No, I mean regular in his attendance."

The Egyptian's face showed no enlightenment.

"His attendance at church," Gavin explained.

"He's far frae it," said Nanny, "and as a body kens, Joe Cruickshanks, the atheist, has the wite o' that. The scoundrel telled Enoch that the great ministers in Edinbury and London believed in no hell except sic as your ain conscience made for you, and ever since syne Enoch has been careless about the future state."

"Ah," said Babbie, waving the Church aside, "what I want to know is whether he is a single man."

"He is not," Gavin replied; "but why do you want to know that?"

"Because single men are such gossips. I

am sorry he is not single, as I want him to repeat to everybody what I told him."

"Trust him to tell Susy," said Nanny, "and Susy to tell the town."

"His wife is a gossip?"

"Ay, she's aye tonguing, especially about her teeth. They're folk wi' siller, and she has a set o' false teeth. It's fair scumfishing to hear her blawing about thae teeth, she's so fleid we dinna ken that they're false."

Nanny had spoken jealously, but suddenly she trembled with apprehension.

"Babbie," she cried, "you didna speak about the poorhouse to Enoch?"

The Egyptian shook her head, though of the poorhouse she had been forced to speak, for Enoch, having seen the doctor going home alone, insisted on knowing why.

"But I knew," the gypsy said, "that the Thrums people would be very unhappy until they discovered where you get the money I am to give you, and as that is a secret, I

hinted to Enoch that your benefactor is Mr. Dishart."

"You should not have said that," interposed Gavin. "I cannot foster such a deception."

"They will foster it without your help," the Egyptian said. "Besides, if you choose, you can say you get the money from a friend."

"Ay, you can say that," Nanny entreated with such eagerness that Babbie remarked a little bitterly:

"There is no fear of Nanny's telling any one that the friend is a gypsy girl."

"Na, na," agreed Nanny, again losing Babbie's sarcasm. "I winna let on. It's so queer to be befriended by an Egyptian."

"It is scarcely respectable," Babbie said.

"It's no," answered simple Nanny.

I suppose Nanny's unintentional cruelty did hurt Babbie as much as Gavin thought. She winced, and her face had two expressions, the one cynical, the other pained. Her mouth curled as if to tell the minister that gratitude

was nothing to her, but her eyes had to struggle to keep back a tear. Gavin was touched, and she saw it, and for a moment they were two people who understood each other.

"I, at least," Gavin said in a low voice, "will know who is the benefactress, and think none the worse of her because she is a gypsy."

At this Babbie smiled gratefully to him, and then both laughed, for they had heard Nanny remarking to the kettle, "But I wouldna hae been nane angry if she had telled Enoch that the minister was to take his tea here. Susy'll no believe't though I tell her, as tell her I will."

To Nanny the table now presented a rich appearance, for besides the teapot there were butter and loaf-bread and cheesies: a biscuit of which only Thrums knows the secret.

"Draw in your chair, Mr. Dishart," she said, in suppressed excitement.

"Yes," said Babbie, "you take this chair,

Mr. Dishart, and Nanny will have that one, and I can sit humbly on the stool."

But Nanny held up her hands in horror.

"Keep us a'!" she exclaimed; "the lassie thinks her and me is to sit down wi' the minister! We're no to gang that length, Babbie; we're just to stand and serve him, and syne we'll sit down when he has risen."

"Delightful!" said Babbie, clapping her hands. "Nanny, you kneel on that side of him, and I will kneel on this. You will hold the butter and I the biscuits."

But Gavin, as this girl was always forgetting, was a lord of creation.

"Sit down both of you at once!" he thundered, "I command you."

Then the two women fell into their seats; Nanny in terror, Babbie affecting it.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MINISTER BEWITCHED—SECOND SERMON AGAINST WOMEN.

To Nanny it was a dizzying experience to sit at the head of her own table, and, with assumed calmness, invite the minister not to spare the loaf-bread. Babbie's prattle, and even Gavin's answers, were but an indistinct noise to her, to be as little regarded, in the excitement of watching whether Mr. Dishart noticed that there was a knife for the butter, as the music of the river by a man who is catching trout. Every time Gavin's cup went to his lips Nanny calculated (correctly) how much he had drunk, and yet, when the right moment arrived, she asked in the English voice that is fashionable at ceremonies, "if his cup was toom."

Perhaps it was well that Nanny had these matters to engross her, for though Gavin spoke freely, he was saying nothing of lasting value,

and some of his remarks to the Egyptian, if preserved for the calmer contemplation of the morrow, might have seemed frivolous to himself. Usually his observations were scrambled for, like ha'pence at a wedding, but to-day they were only for one person. Infected by the Egyptian's high spirits, Gavin had laid aside the minister with his hat, and what was left was only a young man. He who had stamped his feet at thought of a soldier's cloak now wanted to be reminded of it. The little minister, who used to address himself in terms of scorn every time he wasted an hour, was at present dallying with a teaspoon. He even laughed boisterously, flinging back his head, and little knew that behind Nanny's smiling face was a terrible dread, because his chair had once given way before.

Even though our thoughts are not with our company, the mention of our name is a bell to which we usually answer. Hearing hers Nanny started.

"You can tell me, Nanny," the Egyptian had

said, with an arch look at the minister. "Oh, Nanny, for shame! How can you expect to follow our conversation when you only listen to Mr. Dishart?"

"She is saying, Nanny," Gavin broke in, almost gaily for a minister, "that she saw me recently wearing a cloak. You know I have no such thing."

"Na," Nanny answered artlessly, "you have just the thin brown coat wi' the braid round it, forby the ane you have on the now."

"You see," Gavin said to Babbie, "I could not have a new neckcloth, not to speak of a cloak, without everybody in Thrums knowing about it. I dare say Nanny knows all about the braid, and even what it cost."

"Three bawbees the yard at Kyowowy's shop," replied Nanny, promptly, "and your mother sewed it on. Sam'l Fairweather has the marrows o't on his top coat. No that it has the same look on him."

"Nevertheless," Babbie persisted, "I am

sure the minister has a cloak; but perhaps he is ashamed of it. No doubt it is hidden away in the garret."

"Na, we would hae kent o't if it was there," said Nanny.

"But it may be in a chest, and the chest may be locked," the Egyptian suggested.

"Ay, but the kist in the garret isna locked," Nanny answered.

"How do you get to know all these things, Nanny?" asked Gavin, sighing.

"Your congregation tells me. Naebody would lay by news about a minister."

"But how do they know?"

"I dinna ken. They just find out, because they're so fond o' you."

"I hope they will never become so fond of me as that," said Babbie. "Still, Nanny, the minister's cloak is hidden somewhere."

"Losh, what would make him hod it?" demanded the old woman. "Folk that has cloaks doesna bury them in boxes."

At the word "bury" Gavin's hand fell on the table, and he turned to Nanny apprehensively.

"That would depend on how the cloak was got," said the cruel Egyptian. "If it was not his own——"

"Lassie," cried Nanny, "behave yoursel'."

"Or if he found it in his possession against his will?" suggested Gavin, slyly. "He might have got it from some one who picked it up cheap."

"From his wife, for instance," said Babbie, whereupon Gavin suddenly became interested in the floor.

"Ay, ay, the minister was hitting at you there, Babbie," Nanny explained, "for the way you made off wi' the captain's cloak. The Thrums folk wondered less at your taking it than at your no keeping it. It's said to be michty grand."

"It was rather like the one the minister's wife gave him," said Babbie.

"The minister has neither a wife nor a cloak," retorted Nanny.

"He isn't married?" asked Babbie, the picture of incredulity.

Nanny gathered from the minister's face that he deputed to her the task of enlightening this ignorant girl, so she replied with emphasis, "Na, they hinna got him yet, and I'm cheated if it doesna tak them all their time."

Thus do the best of women sell their sex for nothing.

"I did wonder," said the Egyptian, gravely, "at any mere woman's daring to marry such a minister."

"Ay," replied Nanny, spiritedly, "but there's dauring limmers wherever there's a single man."

"So I have often suspected," said Babbie, duly shocked. "But, Nanny, I was told the minister had a wife, by one who said he saw her."

"He lied, then," answered Nanny, turning to Gavin for further instructions.

"But, see, the minister does not deny the horrid charge himself."

"No, and for the reason he didna deny the cloak: because it's no worth his while. I'll tell you wha your friend had seen. It would be somebody that would like to be Mrs. Dishart. There's a hantle o' that kind. Ay, lassie, but wishing winna land a woman in a manse."

"It was one of the soldiers," Babbie said, "who told me about her. He said Mr. Dishart introduced her to him."

"Sojers!" cried Nanny. "I could never thole the name o' them. Sanders in his young days hankered after joining them, and so he would, if it hadna been for the fechting. Ay, and now they've ta'en him awa to the gaol, and sworn lies about him. Dinna put any faith in sojers, lassie."

"I was told," Babbie went on, "that the minister's wife was rather like me."

"Heaven forbid!" ejaculated Nanny, so fervently that all three suddenly sat back from the table.

"I'm no meaning," Nanny continued hurriedly, fearing to offend her benefactress, "but what you're the bonniest tid I ever saw out o' an almanack. But you would ken Mr. Dishart's contempt for bonny faces if you had heard his sermon against them. I didna hear it mysel', for I'm no Auld Licht, but it did the work o' the town for an aucht days."

If Nanny had not taken her eyes off Gavin for the moment she would have known that he was now anxious to change the topic. Babbie saw it, and became suspicious.

"When did he preach against the wiles of women, Nanny?"

"It was long ago," said Gavin, hastily.

"No so very lang syne," corrected Nanny. "It was the Sabbath after the sojers was in Thrums; the day you changed your text so

hurriedly. Some thocht you wasna weel, but Lang Tammas——"

"Thomas Whamond is too officious," Gavin said with dignity. "I forbid you, Nanny, to repeat his story."

"But what made you change your text?" asked Babbie.

"You see he winna tell," Nanny said, wistfully. "Ay, I dinna deny but what I would like richt to ken. But the session's as puzzled as yoursel', Babbie."

"Perhaps more puzzled," answered the Egyptian, with a smile that challenged Gavin's frowns to combat and overthrow them. "What surprises me, Mr. Dishart, is that such a great man can stoop to see whether women are pretty or not. It was very good of you to remember me to-day. I suppose you recognised me by my frock?"

"By your face," he replied, boldly; "by your eyes."

"Nanny," exclaimed the Egyptian, "did you hear what the minister said?"

"Woe is me," answered Nanny, "I missed it."

"He says he would know me anywhere by my eyes."

"So would I mysel'," said Nanny.

"Then what colour are they, Mr. Dishart?" demanded Babbie. "Don't speak, Nanny, for I want to expose him."

She closed her eyes tightly. Gavin was in a quandary. I suppose he had looked at her eyes too long to know much about them.

"Blue," he guessed at last.

"Na, they're black," said Nanny, who had doubtless known this for an hour. I am always marvelling over the cleverness of women, as every one must see who reads this story.

"No but what they micht be blue in some lichts," Nanny added, out of respect to the minister.

"Oh, don't defend him, Nanny," said Babbie, looking reproachfully at Gavin. "I don't see that any minister has a right to denounce women when he is so ignorant of his

subject. I will say it, Nanny, and you need not kick me beneath the table."

Was not all this intoxicating to the little minister, who had never till now met a girl on equal terms? At twenty-one a man is a musical instrument given to the other sex, but it is not as instruments learned at school, for when She sits down to it she cannot tell what tune she is about to play. That is because she has no notion of what the instrument is capable. Babbie's kind-heartedness, her gaiety, her coquetry, her moments of sadness, had been a witch's fingers, and Gavin was still trembling under their touch. Even in being taken to task by her there was a charm, for every pout of her mouth, every shake of her head, said, "You like me, and therefore you have given me the right to tease you." Men sign these agreements without reading them. But, indeed, man is a stupid animal at the best, and thinks all his life that he did not propose until he blurted out, "I love you."

It was later than it should have been when the minister left the mud house, and even then he only put on his hat because Babbie said that she must go.

"But not your way," she added. "I go into the wood and vanish. You know, Nanny, I live up a tree."

"Dinna say that," said Nanny, anxiously, "or I'll be fleid about the siller."

"Don't fear about it. Mr. Dishart will get some of it to-morrow at the Kaims. I would bring it here, but I cannot come so far to-morrow."

"Then I'll hae peace to the end o' my days," said the old woman, "and, Babbie, I wish the same to you wi' all my heart."

"Ah," Babbie replied, mournfully, "I have read my fortune, Nanny, and there is not much happiness in it."

"I hope that is not true," Gavin said, simply.

They were standing at the door, and she was

looking toward the hill, perhaps without seeing it. All at once it came to Gavin that this fragile girl might have a history far sadder and more turbulent than his.

"Do you really care?" she asked, without looking at him.

"Yes," he said, stoutly, "I care."

"Because you do not know me," she said.

"Because I do know you," he answered.

Now she did look at him.

"I believe," she said, making a discovery, "that you misunderstand me less than those who have known me longer."

This was a perilous confidence, for it at once made Gavin say "Babbie."

"Ah," she answered, frankly, "I am glad to hear that. I thought you did not really like me, because you never called me by my name."

Gavin drew a great breath.

"That was not the reason," he said.

The reason was now unmistakable.

"I was wrong," said the Egyptian, a little alarmed; "you do not understand me at all."

She returned to Nanny, and Gavin set off, holding his head high, his brain in a whirl. Five minutes afterwards, when Nanny was at the fire, the diamond ring on her little finger, he came back, looking like one who had just seen sudden death.

"I had forgotten," he said, with a fierceness aimed at himself, "that to-morrow is the Sabbath."

"Need that make any difference?" asked the gypsy.

"At this hour on Monday," said Gavin, hoarsely, "I will be at the Kaims."

He went away without another word, and Babbie watched him from the window. Nanny had not looked up from the ring.

"What a pity he is a minister!" the girl said, reflectively. "Nanny, you are not listening."

The old woman was making the ring flash by the light of the fire.

"Nanny, do you hear me? Did you see Mr. Dishart come back?"

"I heard the door open," Nanny answered, without taking her greedy eyes off the ring. "Was it him? Whaur did you get this, lassie?"

"Give it me back, Nanny, I am going now."

But Nanny did not give it back; she put her other hand over it to guard it, and there she crouched, warming herself not at the fire, but at the ring.

"Give it me, Nanny."

"It winna come off my finger." She gloated over it, nursed it, kissed it.

"I must have it, Nanny."

The Egyptian put her hand lightly on the old woman's shoulder, and Nanny jumped up, pressing the ring to her bosom. Her face had become cunning and ugly; she retreated into a corner.

"Nanny, give me back my ring or I will take it from you."

The cruel light of the diamond was in Nanny's eyes for a moment, and then, shuddering, she said, "Tak your ring awa, tak it out o' my sicht."

In the meantime Gavin was trudging home gloomily composing his second sermon against women. I have already given the entry in my own diary for that day: this is his:— "Notes on Jonah. Exchanged vol. xliii., 'European Magazine,' for Owen's 'Justification' (*per* flying stationer). Began Second Samuel. Visited Nanny Webster." There is no mention of the Egyptian.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONTINUED MISBEHAVIOUR OF THE EGYPTIAN WOMAN.

By the following Monday it was known at many looms that something sat heavily on the Auld Licht minister's mind. On the previous day he had preached his second sermon of warning to susceptible young men, and his first mention of the word "woman" had blown even the sleepy heads upright. Now he had salt fish for breakfast, and on clearing the table Jean noticed that his knife and fork were uncrossed. He was observed walking into a gooseberry bush by Susy Linn, who possessed the pioneer spring-bed of Thrums, and always knew when her man jumped into it by suddenly finding herself shot to the ceiling. Lunan, the tinsmith, and two women, who had the luck to be in the street at the time, saw him stopping at Dr. McQueen's door, as if about to knock, and

then turning smartly away. His hat blew off in the school-wynd, where a wind wanders ever, looking for hats, and he chased it so passionately that Lang Tammas went into Allardyce's smiddy to say—

"I dinna like it. Of course he couldna afford to lose his hat, but he should hae run after it mair reverently."

Gavin, indeed, was troubled. He had avoided speaking of the Egyptian to his mother. He had gone to McQueen's house to ask the doctor to accompany him to the Kaims, but with the knocker in his hand he changed his mind, and now he was at the place of meeting alone. It was a day of thaw, nothing to be heard from a distance but the swish of curling-stones through water on Rashie-bog, where the match for the eldership was going on. Around him, Gavin saw only dejected firs with drops of water falling listlessly from them, clods of snow, and grass that rustled as if animals were crawling through it. All the roads were slack.

I suppose no young man to whom society has not become a cheap thing can be in Gavin's position, awaiting the coming of an attractive girl, without giving thought to what he should say to her. When in the pulpit or visiting the sick, words came in a rush to the little minister, but he had to set his teeth to determine what to say to the Egyptian.

This was because he had not yet decided which of two women she was. Hardly had he started on one line of thought when she crossed his vision in a new light, and drew him after her.

Her "Need that make any difference?" sang in his ear like another divit, cast this time at religion itself, and now he spoke aloud, pointing his finger at a fir: "I said at the mud house that I believed you because I knew you. To my shame be it said that I spoke falsely. How dared you bewitch me? In your presence I flung away the precious hours in frivolity; I even forgot the Sabbath. For this I have myself to blame. I am an unworthy preacher of

the Word. I sinned far more than you who have been brought up godlessly from your cradle. Nevertheless, whoever you are, I call upon you, before we part never to meet again, to repent of your——"

And then it was no mocker of the Sabbath he was addressing, but a woman with a child's face, and there were tears in her eyes. "Do you care?" she was saying, and again he answered, "Yes, I care." This girl's name was not Woman, but Babbie.

Now Gavin made an heroic attempt to look upon both these women at once. "Yes, I believe in you," he said to them, "but henceforth you must send your money to Nanny by another messenger. You are a gypsy and I am a minister; and that must part us. I refuse to see you again. I am not angry with you, but as a minister——"

It was not the disappearance of one of the women that clipped this argument short; it was Babbie singing—

"It fell on a day, on a bonny summer day,
When the corn grew green and yellow,
That there fell out a great dispute
Between Argyle and Airly.

"The Duke of Montrose has written to Argyle
To come in the morning early,
An' lead in his men by the back o' Dunkeld
To plunder the bonny house o' Airly."

"Where are you?" cried Gavin in bewilderment.

"I am watching you from my window so high," answered the Egyptian; and then the minister, looking up, saw her peering at him from a fir.

"How did you get up there?" he asked in amazement.

"On my broomstick," Babbie replied, and sang on—

"The lady looked o'er her window sae high,
And oh! but she looked weary,
And there she espied the great Argyle
Come to plunder the bonny house o' Airly."

"What are you doing there?" Gavin said, wrathfully.

"This is my home," she answered. "I told you I lived in a tree."

"Come down at once," ordered Gavin. To which the singer responded—

"'Come down, come down, Lady Margaret,' he says;
'Come down and kiss me fairly;
Or before the morning clear day light
I'll no leave a standing stane in Airly.'"

"If you do not come down this instant," Gavin said in a rage, "and give me what I was so foolish as to come for, I——"

The Egyptian broke in—

"'I wouldna kiss thee, great Argyle,
I wouldna kiss thee fairly;
I wouldna kiss thee, great Argyle,
Gin you shouldna leave a standing stane in Airly.'"

"You have deceived Nanny," Gavin cried, hotly, "and you have brought me here to deride me. I will have no more to do with you."

He walked away quickly, but she called after him, "I am coming down. I have the money," and next moment a snowball hit his hat.

"That is for being cross," she explained, appearing so unexpectedly at his elbow that he was taken aback. "I had to come close up to you before I flung it, or it would have fallen over my shoulder. Why are you so nasty to-day? and, oh, do you know you were speaking to yourself?"

"You are mistaken," said Gavin, severely. "I was speaking to you."

"You didn't see me till I began to sing, did you?"

"Nevertheless I was speaking to you, or rather, I was saying to myself what——"

"What you had decided to say to me?" said the delighted gypsy. "Do you prepare your talk like sermons? I hope you have prepared something nice for me. If it is very nice I may give you this bunch of holly."

She was dressed as he had seen her previously, but for a cluster of holly berries at her breast.

"I don't know that you will think it nice," the minister answered, slowly, "but my duty——"

"If it is about duty," entreated Babbie, "don't say it. Don't, and I will give you the berries."

She took the berries from her dress, smiling triumphantly the while like one who had discovered a cure for duty; and instead of pointing the finger of wrath at her, Gavin stood expectant.

"But no," he said, remembering who he was, and pushing the gift from him, "I will not be bribed. I must tell you——"

"Now," said the Egyptian, sadly, "I see you are angry with me. Is it because I said I lived in a tree? Do forgive me for that dreadful lie."

She had gone on her knees before he could

stop her, and was gazing imploringly at him, with her hands clasped.

"You are mocking me again," said Gavin, "but I am not angry with you. Only you must understand——"

She jumped up and put her fingers to her ears.

"You see I can hear nothing," she said.

"Listen while I tell you——"

"I don't hear a word. Why do you scold me when I have kept my promise? If I dared take my fingers from my ears I would give you the money for Nanny. And, Mr. Dishart, I must be gone in five minutes."

"In five minutes!" echoed Gavin, with such a dismal face that Babbie heard the words with her eyes, and dropped her hands.

"Why are you in such haste?" he asked, taking the five pounds mechanically, and forgetting all that he had meant to say.

"Because they require me at home," she answered, with a sly glance at her fir. "And,

remember, when I run away you must not follow me."

"I won't," said Gavin, so promptly that she was piqued.

"Why not?" she asked. "But of course you only came here for the money. Well, you have got it. Good-bye."

"You know that was not what I meant," said Gavin, stepping after her. "I have told you already that whatever other people say, I trust you. I believe in you, Babbie."

"Was that what you were saying to the tree?" asked the Egyptian, demurely. Then, perhaps thinking it wisest not to press this point, she continued irrelevantly, "It seems such a pity that you are a minister."

"A pity to be a minister!" exclaimed Gavin, indignantly. "Why, why, you—why, Babbie, how have you been brought up?"

"In a curious way," Babbie answered, shortly, "but I can't tell you about that just now. Would you like to hear all about me?"

Suddenly she seemed to have become confidential.

"Do you really think me a gypsy?" she asked.

"I have tried not to ask myself that question."

"Why?"

"Because it seems like doubting your word."

"I don't see how you can think of me at all without wondering who I am."

"No, and so I try not to think of you at all."

"Oh, I don't know that you need do that."

"I have not quite succeeded."

The Egyptian's pique had vanished, but she may have thought that the conversation was becoming dangerous, for she said abruptly—

"Well, I sometimes think about you."

"Do you?" said Gavin, absurdly gratified. "What do you think about me?"

"I wonder," answered the Egyptian, pleasantly, "which of us is the taller."

Gavin's fingers twitched with mortification, and not only his fingers but his toes.

"Let us measure," she said, sweetly, putting her back to his. "You are not stretching your neck, are you?"

But the minister broke away from her.

"There is one subject," he said, with great dignity, "that I allow no one to speak of in my presence, and that is my—my height."

His face was as white as his cravat when the surprised Egyptian next looked at him, and he was panting like one who has run a mile. She was ashamed of herself, and said so.

"It is a topic I would rather not speak about," Gavin answered, dejectedly, "especially to you."

He meant that he would rather be a tall man in her company than in any other, and possibly she knew this, though all she answered was—

"You wanted to know if I am really a gypsy. Well, I am."

"An ordinary gypsy?"

"Do you think me ordinary?"

"I wish I knew what to think of you."

"Ah, well, that is my forbidden topic. But we have a good many ideas in common after all, have we not, though you are only a minis—I mean, though I am only a gypsy?"

There fell between them a silence that gave Babbie time to remember she must go.

"I have already stayed too long," she said. "Give my love to Nanny, and say that I am coming to see her soon, perhaps on Monday. I don't suppose you will be there on Monday, Mr. Dishart?"

"I—I cannot say."

"No, you will be too busy. Are you to take the holly berries?"

"I had better not," said Gavin, dolefully.

"Oh, if you don't want them——"

"Give them to me," he said, and as he took them his hand shook.

"I know why you are looking so troubled," said the Egyptian, archly. "You think I am

to ask you the colour of my eyes, and you have forgotten again."

He would have answered, but she checked him.

"Make no pretence," she said, severely; "I know you think they are blue."

She came close to him until her face almost touched his.

"Look hard at them," she said, solemnly, "and after this you may remember that they are black, black, black!"

At each repetition of the word she shook her head in his face. She was adorable. Gavin's arms—but they met on nothing. She had run away.

When the little minister had gone, a man came from behind a tree and shook his fist in the direction taken by the gypsy. It was Rob Dow, black with passion.

"It's the Egyptian!" he cried. "You limmer, wha are you that hae got haud o' the minister?"

He pursued her, but she vanished as from Gavin in Windyghoul.

"A common Egyptian!" he muttered when he had to give up the search. "But take care, you little devil," he called aloud; "take care; if I catch you playing pranks wi' that man again I'll wring your neck like a hen's!"

CHAPTER XVII.

INTRUSION OF HAGGART INTO THESE PAGES AGAINST THE AUTHOR'S WISH.

Margaret having heard the doctor say that one may catch cold in the back, had decided instantly to line Gavin's waistcoat with flannel. She was thus engaged, with pins in her mouth and the scissors hiding from her every time she wanted them, when Jean, red and flurried, abruptly entered the room.

"There! I forgot to knock at the door again," Jean exclaimed, pausing contritely.

"Never mind. Is it Rob Dow wanting the minister?" asked Margaret, who had seen Rob pass the manse dyke.

"Na, he wasna wanting to see the minister."

"Ah, then, he came to see you, Jean," said Margaret, archly.

"A widow man!" cried Jean, tossing her

head. "But Rob Dow was in no condition to be friendly wi' onybody the now."

"Jean, you don't mean that he has been drinking again?"

"I canna say he was drunk."

"Then what condition was he in?"

"He was in a—a swearing condition," Jean answered, guardedly. "But what I want to speir at you is, can I gang down to the Tenements for a minute? I'll run there and back."

"Certainly you can go, Jean, but you must not run. You are always running. Did Dow bring you word that you were wanted in the Tenements?"

"No exactly, but I—I want to consult Tammas Haggart about—about something."

"About Dow, I believe, Jean?"

"Na, but about something he has done. Oh, ma'am, you surely dinna think I would take a widow man?"

It was the day after Gavin's meeting with the Egyptian at the Kaims, and here is Jean's

real reason for wishing to consult Haggart Half an hour before she hurried to the parlour she had been at the kitchen door wondering whether she should spread out her washing in the garret or risk hanging it in the courtyard. She had just decided on the garret when she saw Rob Dow morosely regarding her from the gateway.

"Whaur is he?" growled Rob.

"He's out, but it's no for me to say whaur he is," replied Jean, whose weakness was to be considered a church official. "No that I ken," truthfulness compelled her to add, for she had an ambition to be everything she thought Gavin would like a woman to be.

Rob seized her wrists viciously and glowered into her face.

"You're ane o' them," he said.

"Let me go. Ane o' what?"

"Ane o' thae limmers called women."

"Sal," retorted Jean with spirit, "you're ane o' thae brutes called men. You're drunk, Rob Dow."

"In the legs maybe, but no higher. I haud a heap."

"Drunk again, after all your promises to the minister! And you said yoursel' that he had pulled you out o' hell by the root."

"It's himsel' that has flung me back again," Rob said, wildly. "Jean Baxter, what does it mean when a minister carries flowers in his pouch; ay, and takes them out to look at them ilka minute?"

"How do you ken about the holly?" asked Jean, off her guard.

"You limmer," said Dow, "you've been in his pouches."

"It's a lie!" cried the outraged Jean. "I just saw the holly this morning in a jug on his chimley."

"Carefully put by? Is it hod on the chimley? Does he stand looking at it? Do you tell me he's fond-like o't?"

"Mercy me!" Jean exclaimed, beginning to shake; "wha is she, Rob Dow?"

"Let me see it first in its jug," Rob answered, slyly, "and syne I may tell you."

This was not the only time Jean had been asked to show the minister's belongings. Snecky Hobart, among others, had tried on Gavin's hat in the manse kitchen, and felt queer for some time afterwards. Women had been introduced on tiptoe to examine the handle of his umbrella. But Rob had not come to admire. He snatched the holly from Jean's hands, and casting it on the ground pounded it with his heavy boots, crying, "Greet as you like, Jean. That's the end o' his flowers, and if I had the tawpie he got them frae I would serve her in the same way."

"I'll tell him what you've done," said terrified Jean, who had tried to save the berries at the expense of her fingers.

"Tell him," Dow roared; "and tell him what I said too. Ay, and tell him I was at the Kaims yestreen. Tell him I'm hunting high and low for an Egyptian woman."

He flung recklessly out of the courtyard,

leaving Jean looking blankly at the mud that had been holly lately. Not his act of sacrilege was distressing her, but his news. Were these berries a love token? Had God let Rob Dow say they were a gypsy's love token, and not slain him?

That Rob spoke of the Egyptian of the riots Jean never doubted. It was known that the minister had met this woman in Nanny Webster's house, but was it not also known that he had given her such a talking-to as she could never come above? Many could repeat the words in which he had announced to Nanny that his wealthy friends in Glasgow were to give her all she needed. They could also tell how majestic he looked when he turned the Egyptian out of the house. In short, Nanny having kept her promise of secrecy, the people had been forced to construct the scene in the mud house for themselves, and it was only their story that was known to Jean.

She decided that, so far as the gypsy was

concerned, Rob had talked trash. He had seen the holly in the minister's hand, and, being in drink, had mixed it up with the gossip about the Egyptian. But that Gavin had preserved the holly because of the donor was as obvious to Jean as that the vase in her hand was empty. Who could she be? No doubt all the single ladies in Thrums were in love with him, but that, Jean was sure, had not helped them a step forward.

To think was to Jean a waste of time. Discovering that she had been thinking, she was dismayed. There were the wet clothes in the basket looking reproachfully at her. She hastened back to Gavin's room with the vase, but it too had eyes, and they said, "When the minister misses his holly he will question you." Now Gavin had already smiled several times to Jean, and once he had marked passages for her in her "Pilgrim's Progress," with the result that she prized the marks more even than the passages. To lose his good opinion was terrible to her. In her perplexity she decided to consult

wise Tammas Haggart, and hence her appeal to Margaret.

To avoid Chirsty, the humourist's wife, Jean sought Haggart at his workshop window, which was so small that an old book sufficed for its shutter. Haggart, whom she could see distinctly at his loom, soon guessed from her knocks and signs (for he was strangely quick in the uptake) that she wanted him to open the window.

"I want to speak to you confidentially," Jean said in a low voice. "If you saw a grand man gey fond o' a flower, what would you think?"

"I would think, Jean," Haggart answered, reflectively, "that he had gaen siller for't; ay, I would wonder——"

"What would you wonder?"

"I would wonder how muckle he paid."

"But if he was a—a minister, and keepit the flower—say it was a common rose—fond-like on his chimley, what would you think?"

"I would think it was a black-burning disgrace for a minister to be fond o' flowers."

"I dinna haud wi' that."

"Jean," said Haggart, "I allow no one to contradict me."

"It wasna my design. But, Tammas, if a—a minister was fond o' a particular flower—say a rose—and you destroyed it by an accident, when he wasna looking, what would you do?"

"I would gie him another rose for't."

"But if you didna want him to ken you had meddled wi't on his chimley, what would you do?"

"I would put the new rose on the chimley, and he would never ken the differ."

"That's what I'll do," muttered Jean, but she said aloud—

"But it micht be that particular rose he liked?"

"Havers, Jean. To a thinking man one rose is identical wi' another rose. But how are you speiring?"

"Just out o' curiosity, and I maun be

stepping now. Thank you kindly, Tammas, for your humour."

"You're welcome," Haggart answered, and closed his window.

That day Rob Dow spent in misery, but so little were his fears selfish that he scarcely gave a thought to his conduct at the manse. For an hour he sat at his loom with his arms folded. Then he slouched out of the house, cursing little Micah, so that a neighbour cried "You drucken scoundrel!" after him. "He may be a wee drunk," said Micah in his father's defence, "but he's no mortal." Rob wandered to the Kaims in seach of the Egyptian, and returned home no happier. He flung himself upon his bed and dared Micah to light the lamp. About gloaming he rose, unable to keep his mouth shut on his thoughts any longer, and staggered to the Tenements to consult Haggart. He found the humourist's door ajar, and Wearyworld listening at it. "Out o' the road!" cried Rob, savagely, and flung the policeman into the gutter.

"That was ill-dune, Rob Dow," Wearyworld said, picking himself up leisurely.

"I'm thinking it was weel-dune," snarled Rob.

"Ay," said Wearyworld, "we needna quarrel about a difference o' opeenion; but, Rob——"

Dow, however, had already entered the house and slammed the door.

"Ay, ay," muttered Wearyworld, departing, "you micht hae stood still, Rob, and argued it out wi' me."

In less than an hour after his conversation with Jean at the window it had suddenly struck Haggart that the minister she spoke of must be Mr. Dishart. In two hours he had confided his suspicions to Chirsty. In ten minutes she had filled the house with gossips. Rob arrived to find them in full cry.

"Ay, Rob," said Chirsty, genially, for gossip levels ranks, "you're just in time to hear a queery about the minister."

"Rob," said the Glen Quharity post, from whom I subsequently got the story, "Mr. Dishart has fallen in—in—what do you call the thing, Chirsty?"

Birse knew well what the thing was called, but the word is a staggerer to say in company.

"In love," answered Chirsty, boldly.

"Now we ken what he was doing in the country yestreen," said Snecky Hobart, "the which has been bothering us sair."

"The manse is fu' o' the flowers she sends him," said Tibbie Craik. "Jean's at her wits'-end to ken whaur to put them a'."

"Wha is she?"

It was Rob Dow who spoke. All saw he had been drinking, or they might have wondered at his vehemence. As it was, everybody looked at every other body, and then everybody sighed.

"Ay, wha is she?" repeated several.

"I see you ken nothing about her," said

Rob, much relieved; and he then lapsed into silence.

"We ken a' about her," said Snecky, "except just wha she is. Ay, that's what we canna bottom. Maybe you could guess, Tammas?"

"Maybe I could, Sneck," Haggart replied, cautiously; "but on that point I offer no opinion."

"If she bides on the Kaims road," said Tibbie Craik, "she maun be a farmer's dochter. What say you to Bell Finlay?"

"Na; she's U. P. But it micht be Loups o' Malcolm's sister. She's promised to Muckle Haws; but no doubt she would gie him the go-by at a word frae the minister."

"It's mair likely," said Chirsty, "to be the factor at the Spittal's lassie. The factor has a grand garden, and that would account for such basketfuls o' flowers."

"Whaever she is," said Birse, "I'm thinking he could hae done better."

"I'll be fine pleased wi' ony o' them," said Tibbie, who had a magenta silk, and so was jealous of no one.

"It hasna been proved," Haggart pointed out, "that the flowers came frae thae parts. She may be sending them frae Glasgow."

"I aye understood it was a Glasgow lady," said Sneeky. "He'll be like the Tilliedrum minister that got a lady to send him to the college on the promise that he would marry her as soon as he got a kirk. She made him sign a paper."

"The far-seeing limmer," exclaimed Chirsty. "But if that's what Mr. Dishart has done, how has he kept it so secret?"

"He wouldna want the women o' the congregation to ken he was promised till after they had voted for him."

"I dinna haud wi' that explanation o't," said Haggart, "but I may tell you that I ken for sure she's a Glasgow leddy. Lads, ministers is near aye bespoke afore they're licensed.

There's a michty competition for them in the big toons. Ay, the leddies just stand at the college gates, as you may say, and snap them up as they come out."

"And just as well for the ministers, I'se uphaud," said Tibbie, "for it saves them a heap o' persecution when they come to the like o' Thrums. There was Mr. Meiklejohn, the U. P. minister: he was no sooner placed than every genteel woman in the town was persecuting him. The Miss Dobies was the maist shameless; they fair hunted him."

"Ay," said Snecky; "and in the tail o' the day ane o' them snacked him up. Billies, did you ever hear o' a minister being refused?"

"Never."

"Weel, then, I have; and by a widow woman too. His name was Samson, and if it had been Tamson she would hae ta'en him. Ay, you may look, but it's true. Her name was Turnbull, and she had another gent after

her, name o' Tibbets. She couldna make up her mind atween them, and for a while she just keeped them dangling on. Ay, but in the end she took Tibbets. And what, think you, was her reason? As you ken, thae grand folk has their initials on their spoons and nichtgowns. Ay, weel, she thocht it would be mair handy to take Tibbets, because if she had ta'en the minister the *T's* would have had to be changed to *S's*. It was thoctfu' o' her."

"Is Tibbets living?" asked Haggart sharply.

"No; he's dead."

"What," asked Haggart, "was the corp to trade?"

"I dinna ken."

"I thocht no'," said Haggart, triumphantly. "Weel, I warrant he was a minister too. Ay, catch a woman giving up a minister, except for another minister."

All were looking on Haggart with admiration, when a voice from the door cried—

"Listen, and I'll tell you a queerer ane than that."

"Dagont," cried Birse, "it's Wearywarld, and he has been hearkening. Leave him to me."

When the post returned, the conversation was back at Mr. Dishart.

"Yes, lathies," Haggart was saying, "daftness about women comes to all, gentle and simple, common and colleged, humourists and no humourists. You say Mr. Dishart has preached ower muckle at women to stoop to marriage, but that makes no differ. Mony a humorous thing hae I said about women, and yet Chirsty has me. It's the same wi' ministers. A' at ainee they see a lassie no' unlike ither lassies, away goes their learning, and they skirl out, 'You dawtie!' That's what comes to all."

"But it hasna come to Mr. Dishart," cried Rob Dow, jumping to his feet. He had sought Haggart to tell him all, but now he saw the

wisdom of telling nothing. "I'm sick o' your blathers. Instead o' the minister's being sweethearting yesterday, he was just at the Kaims visiting the gamekeeper. I met him in the Wast town-end, and gaed there and back wi' him."

"That's proof it's a Glasgow leddy," said Snecky.

"I tell you there's no leddy ava!" swore Rob.

"Yea, and wha sends the baskets o' flowers, then?"

"There was only one flower," said Rob, turning to his host.

"I aye understood," said Haggart heavily, "that there was only one flower."

"But though there was just ane," persisted Chirsty, "what we want to ken is wha gae him it."

"It was me that gae him it," said Rob; "it was growing on the roadside, and I plucked it and gae it to him."

The company dwindled away shamefacedly, yet unconvinced; but Haggart had courage to say slowly—

"Yes, Rob, I had aye a notion that he got it frae you."

Meanwhile, Gavin, unaware that talk about him and a woman unknown had broken out in Thrums, was gazing, sometimes lovingly and again with scorn, at a little bunch of holly-berries which Jean had gathered from her father's garden. Once she saw him fling them out of his window, and then she rejoiced. But an hour afterwards she saw him pick them up, and then she mourned. Nevertheless, to her great delight, he preached his third sermon against woman on the following Sabbath. It was universally acknowledged to be the best of the series. It was also the last.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CADDAM—LOVE LEADING TO A RUPTURE.

Gavin told himself not to go near the mud house on the following Monday; but he went. The distance is half a mile, and the time he took was two hours. This was owing to his setting out due west to reach a point due north; yet with the intention of deceiving none save himself. His reason had warned him to avoid the Egyptian, and his desires had consented to be dragged westward because they knew he had started too soon. When the proper time came they knocked reason on the head and carried him straight to Caddam. Here reason came to, and again began to state its case. Desires permitted him to halt, as if to argue the matter out, but were thus tolerant merely because from where he stood he could see Nanny's doorway. When Babbie emerged from it reason seems to have made one final effort, for Gavin quickly took that

side of a tree which is loved of squirrels at the approach of an enemy. He looked round the tree-trunk at her, and then reason discarded him. The gypsy had two empty pans in her hands. For a second she gazed in the minister's direction, then demurely leaped the ditch of leaves that separated Nanny's yard from Caddam, and strolled into the wood. Discovering with indignation that he had been skulking behind the tree, Gavin came into the open. How good of the Egyptian, he reflected, to go to the well for water, and thus save the old woman's arms! Reason shouted from near the manse (he only heard the echo) that he could still make up on it. "Come along," said his desires, and marched him prisoner to the well.

The path which Babbie took that day is lost in blaeberry-leaves now, and my little maid and I lately searched for an hour before we found the well. It was dry, choked with broom and stones, and broken rusty pans, but we sat down where Babbie and Gavin had talked, and

I stirred up many memories. Probably two of those pans, that could be broken in the hands to-day like shortbread, were Nanny's, and almost certainly the stones are fragments from the great slab that used to cover the well. Children like to peer into wells to see what the world is like at the other side, and so this covering was necessary. Rob Angus was the strong man who bore the stone to Caddam, flinging it a yard before him at a time. The well had also a wooden lid with leather hinges, and over this the stone was dragged.

Gavin arrived at the well in time to offer Babbie the loan of his arms. In her struggle she had taken her lips into her mouth, but in vain did she tug at the stone, which refused to do more than turn round on the wood. But for her presence, the minister's efforts would have been equally futile. Though not strong, however, he had the national horror of being beaten before a spectator, and once at school he had won a fight by telling his big antagonist to

come on until the boy was tired of pummelling him. As he fought with the stone now, pains shot through his head, and his arms threatened to come away at the shoulders; but remove it he did.

"How strong you are!" Babbie said with open admiration.

I am sure no words of mine could tell how pleased the minister was; yet he knew he was not strong, and might have known that she had seen him do many things far more worthy of admiration without admiring them. This, indeed, is a sad truth, that we seldom give our love to what is worthiest in its object.

"How curious that we should have met here," Babbie said, in her dangerously friendly way, as they filled the pans. "Do you know I quite started when your shadow fell suddenly on the stone. Did you happen to be passing through the wood?"

"No," answered truthful Gavin, "I was

looking for you. I thought you saw me from Nanny's door."

"Did you? I only saw a man hiding behind a tree, and of course I knew it could not be you."

Gavin looked at her sharply, but she was not laughing at him.

"It was I," he admitted; "but I was not exactly hiding behind the tree."

"You had only stepped behind it for a moment," suggested the Egyptian.

Her gravity gave way to laughter under Gavin's suspicious looks, but the laughing ended abruptly. She had heard a noise in the wood, Gavin heard it too, and they both turned round in time to see two ragged boys running from them. When boys are very happy they think they must be doing wrong, and in a wood, of which they are among the natural inhabitants, they always take flight from the enemy, adults, if given time. For my own part, when I see a boy drop from a tree I am as little

surprised as if he were an apple or a nut. But Gavin was startled, picturing these spies handing in the new sensation about him at every door, as a district visitor distributes tracts. The gypsy noted his uneasiness and resented it.

"What does it feel like to be afraid?" she asked, eyeing him.

"I am afraid of nothing," Gavin answered, offended in turn.

"Yes, you are. When you saw me come out of Nanny's you crept behind a tree; when these boys showed themselves you shook. You are afraid of being seen with me. Go away, then; I don't want you."

"Fear," said Gavin, "is one thing, and prudence is another."

"Another name for it," Babbie interposed.

"Not at all; but I owe it to my position to be careful. Unhappily, you do not seem to feel —to recognise—to know——"

"To know what?"

"Let us avoid the subject."

"No," the Egyptian said, petulantly. "I hate not to be told things. Why must you be 'prudent'?"

"You should see," Gavin replied, awkwardly, "that there is a—a difference between a minister and a gypsy."

"But if I am willing to overlook it?" asked Babbie, impertinently.

Gavin beat the brushwood mournfully with his staff.

"I cannot allow you," he said, "to talk disrespectfully of my calling. It is the highest a man can follow. I wish——"

He checked himself; but he was wishing she could see him in his pulpit.

"I suppose," said the gypsy, reflectively, "one must be very clever to be a minister."

"As for that——" answered Gavin, waving his hand grandly.

"And it must be nice, too," continued Babbie, "to be able to speak for a whole hour to people who can neither answer nor go away.

Is it true that before you begin to preach you lock the door to keep the congregation in?"

"I must leave you if you talk in that way."

"I only wanted to know."

"Oh, Babbie, I am afraid you have little acquaintance with the inside of churches. Do you sit under anybody?"

"Do I sit under anybody?" repeated Babbie, blankly.

Is it any wonder that the minister sighed? "Whom do you sit under?" was his form of salutation to strangers.

"I mean, where do you belong?" he said.

"Wanderers," Babbie answered, still misunderstanding him, "belong to nowhere in particular."

"I am only asking you if you ever go to church?"

"Oh, that is what you mean. Yes, I go often."

"What church?"

"You promised not to ask questions."

"I only mean, what denomination do you belong to?"

"Oh, the—the—— Is there an English church denomination?"

Gavin groaned.

"Well, that is my denomination," said Babbie, cheerfully. "Some day, though, I am coming to hear you preach. I should like to see how you look in your gown."

"We don't wear gowns."

"What a shame! But I am coming, nevertheless. I used to like going to church in Edinburgh."

"You have lived in Edinburgh?"

"We gypsies have lived everywhere," Babbie said, lightly, though she was annoyed at having mentioned Edinburgh.

"But all gypsies don't speak as you do?" said Gavin, puzzled again. "I don't understand you."

"Of course you dinna," replied Babbie, in broad Scotch. "Maybe, if you did, you would think that it's mair imprudent in me to stand here cracking clavers wi' the minister than for the minister to waste his time cracking wi' me."

"Then why do it?"

"Because—— Oh, because prudence and I always take different roads."

"Tell me who you are, Babbie," the minister entreated; "at least, tell me where your encampment is."

"You have warned me against imprudence," she said.

"I want," Gavin continued, earnestly, "to know your people, your father and mother."

"Why?"

"Because," he answered, stoutly, "I like their daughter."

At that Babbie's fingers played on one of the pans, and, for the moment, there was no more badinage in her.

"You are a good man," she said, abruptly; "but you will never know my parents."

"Are they dead?"

"They may be; I cannot tell."

"This is all incomprehensible to me."

"I suppose it is. I never asked any one to understand me."

"Perhaps not," said Gavin, excitedly; "but the time has come when I must know everything of you that is to be known."

Babbie receded from him in quick fear.

"You must never speak to me in that way again," she said, in a warning voice.

"In what way?"

Gavin knew what way very well, but he thirsted to hear in her words what his own had implied. She did not choose to oblige him, however.

"You never will understand me," she said. "I daresay I might be more like other people now, if—if I had been brought up differently. Not," she added, passionately, "that I want to

be like others. Do you never feel, when you have been living a humdrum life for months, that you must break out of it, or go crazy?"

Her vehemence alarmed Gavin, who hastened to reply—

"My life is not humdrum. It is full of excitement, anxieties, pleasures, and I am too fond of the pleasures. Perhaps it is because I have more of the luxuries of life than you that I am so content with my lot."

"Why, what can you know of luxuries?"

"I have eighty pounds a year."

Babbie laughed. "Are ministers so poor?" she asked, calling back her gravity.

"It is a considerable sum," said Gavin, a little hurt, for it was the first time he had ever heard any one speak disrespectfully of eighty pounds.

The Egyptian looked down at her ring, and smiled.

"I shall always remember your saying

that," she told him, "after we have quarrelled."

"We shall not quarrel," said Gavin, decidedly.

"Oh, yes, we shall."

"We might have done so once, but we know each other too well now."

"That is why we are to quarrel."

"About what?" said the minister. "I have not blamed you for deriding my stipend, though how it can seem small in the eyes of a gypsy——"

"Who can afford," broke in Babbie, "to give Nanny seven shillings a week?"

"True," Gavin said, uncomfortably, while the Egyptian again toyed with her ring. She was too impulsive to be reticent except now and then, and suddenly she said, "You have looked at this ring before now. Do you know that if you had it on your finger you would be more worth robbing than with eighty pounds in each of your pockets?"

"Where did you get it?" demanded Gavin, fiercely.

"I am sorry I told you that," the gypsy said, regretfully.

"Tell me how you got it," Gavin insisted, his face now hard.

"Now, you see, we are quarrelling."

"I must know."

"Must know! You forget yourself," she said, haughtily.

"No, but I have forgotten myself too long. Where did you get that ring?"

"Good afternoon to you," said the Egyptian, lifting her pans.

"It is not good afternoon," he cried, detaining her. "It is good-bye for ever, unless you answer me."

"As you please," she said. "I will not tell you where I got my ring. It is no affair of yours."

"Yes, Babbie, it is."

She was not, perhaps, greatly grieved to hear him say so, for she made no answer.

"You are no gypsy," he continued, suspiciously.

"Perhaps not," she answered, again taking the pans.

"This dress is but a disguise."

"It may be. Why don't you go away and leave me?"

"I am going," he replied, wildly. "I will have no more to do with you. Formerly I pitied you, but——"

He could not have used a word more calculated to rouse the Egyptian's ire, and she walked away with her head erect. Only once did she look back, and it was to say—

"This is prudence—now."

CHAPTER XIX.

CIRCUMSTANCES LEADING TO THE FIRST SERMON IN APPROVAL OF WOMEN.

A YOUNG man thinks that he alone of mortals is impervious to love, and so the discovery that he is in it suddenly alters his views of his own mechanism. It is thus not unlike a rap on the funny-bone. Did Gavin make this discovery when the Egyptian left him? Apparently he only came to the brink of it and stood blind. He had driven her from him for ever, and his sense of loss was so acute that his soul cried out for the cure rather than for the name of the malady.

In time he would have realised what had happened, but time was denied him, for just as he was starting for the mud house Babbie saved his dignity by returning to him. It was not

her custom to fix her eyes on the ground as she walked, but she was doing so now, and at the same time swinging the empty pans. Doubtless she had come back for more water, in the belief that Gavin had gone. He pronounced her name with a sense of guilt, and she looked up surprised, or seemingly surprised, to find him still there.

"I thought you had gone away long ago," she said stiffly.

"Otherwise," asked Gavin the dejected, "you would not have come back to the well?"

"Certainly not."

"I am very sorry. Had you waited another moment I should have been gone."

This was said in apology, but the wilful Egyptian chose to change its meaning.

"You have no right to blame me for disturbing you," she declared with warmth.

"I did not. I only——"

"You could have been a mile away by this time. Nanny wanted more water."

Babbie scrutinised the minister sharply as

she made this statement. Surely her conscience troubled her, for on his not answering immediately she said, "Do you presume to disbelieve me? What could have made me return except to fill the pans again?"

"Nothing," Gavin admitted eagerly, "and I assure you——"

Babbie should have been grateful to his denseness, but it merely set her mind at rest.

"Say anything against me you choose," she told him. "Say it as brutally as you like, for I won't listen."

She stopped to hear his response to that, and she looked so cold that it almost froze on Gavin's lips.

"I had no right," he said, dolefully, "to speak to you as I did."

"You had not," answered the proud Egyptian. She was looking away from him to show that his repentance was not even interesting to her. However, she had forgotten already not to listen.

"What business is it of mine?" asked Gavin, amazed at his late presumption, "whether you are a gypsy or no?"

"None whatever."

"And as for the ring——"

Here he gave her an opportunity of allowing that his curiosity about the ring was warranted. She declined to help him, however, and so he had to go on.

"The ring is yours," he said, "and why should you not wear it?"

"Why, indeed?"

"I am afraid I have a very bad temper."

He paused for a contradiction, but she nodded her head in agreement.

"And it is no wonder," he continued, "that you think me a—a brute."

"I'm sure it is not."

"But, Babbie, I want you to know that I despise myself for my base suspicions. No sooner did I see them than I loathed them and myself for harbouring them. Despite this

mystery, I look upon you as a noble-hearted girl. I shall always think of you so."

This time Babbie did not reply.

"That was all I had to say," concluded Gavin, "except that I hope you will not punish Nanny for my sins. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said the Egyptian, who was looking at the well.

The minister's legs could not have heard him give the order to march, for they stood waiting.

"I thought," said the Egyptian, after a moment, "that you said you were going."

"I was only—brushing my hat," Gavin answered with dignity. "You want me to go?"

She bowed, and this time he did set off.

"You can go if you like," she remarked now.

He turned at this.

"But you said——" he began, diffidently.

"No, I did not," she answered, with indignation.

He could see her face at last.

"You—you are crying!" he exclaimed, in bewilderment.

"Because you are so unfeeling," sobbed Babbie.

"What have I said, what have I done?" cried Gavin, in an agony of self-contempt. "Oh, that I had gone away at once!"

"That is cruel."

"What is?"

"To say that."

"What did I say?"

"That you wished you had gone away."

"But surely," the minister faltered, "you asked me to go."

"How can you say so?" asked the gypsy, reproachfully.

Gavin was distracted. "On my word," he said, earnestly, "I thought you did. And now I have made you unhappy. Babbie, I wish I were anybody but myself; I am a hopeless lout."

"Now you are unjust," said Babbie, hiding her face.

"Again? To you?"

"No, you stupid," she said, beaming on him in her most delightful manner, "to yourself!"

She gave him both her hands impetuously, and he did not let them go until she added:

"I am so glad that you are reasonable at last. Men are so much more unreasonable than women, don't you think?"

"Perhaps we are," Gavin said, diplomatically.

"Of course you are. Why, every one knows that. Well, I forgive you; only remember, you have admitted that it was all your fault?"

She was pointing her finger at him like a schoolmistress, and Gavin hastened to answer:

"You were not to blame at all."

"I like to hear you say that," explained the representative of the more reasonable sex, "because it was really all my fault."

"No, no."

"Yes it was; but of course I could not say so until you had asked my pardon. You must understand that?"

The representative of the less reasonable sex could not understand it, but he agreed recklessly, and it seemed so plain to the woman that she continued confidentially:

"I pretended that I did not want to make it up, but I did."

"Did you?" asked Gavin, elated.

"Yes, but nothing could have induced me to make the first advance. You see why?"

"Because I was so unreasonable?" asked Gavin, doubtfully.

"Yes, and nasty. You admit you were nasty?"

"Undoubtedly, I have an evil temper. It has brought me to shame many times."

"Oh, I don't know," said the Egyptian, charitably. "I like it. I believe I admire bullies."

"Did I bully you?"

"I never knew such a bully. You quite frightened me."

Gavin began to be less displeased with himself.

"You are sure," inquired Babbie, "that you had no right to question me about the ring?"

"Certain," answered Gavin.

"Then I will tell you all about it," said Babbie, "for it is natural that you should want to know."

He looked eagerly at her, and she had become serious and sad.

"I must tell you at the same time," she said, "who I am, and then—then we shall never see each other any more."

"Why should you tell me?" cried Gavin, his hand rising to stop her.

"Because you have a right to know," she replied, now too much in earnest to see that she was yielding a point. "I should prefer not to tell you; yet there is nothing wrong in my secret, and it may make you think of me kindly when I have gone away."

"Don't speak in that way, Babbie, after you have forgiven me."

"Did I hurt you? It was only because I

know that you cannot trust me while I remain a mystery. I know you would try to trust me, but doubts would cross your mind. Yes, they would; they are the shadows that mysteries cast. Who can believe a gypsy if the odds are against her?"

"I can," said Gavin; but she shook her head, and so would he had he remembered three recent sermons of his own preaching.

"I had better tell you all," she said, with an effort.

"It is my turn now to refuse to listen to you," exclaimed Gavin, who was only a chivalrous boy. "Babbie, I should like to hear your story, but until you want to tell it to me I will not listen to it. I have faith in your honour, and that is sufficient."

It was boyish, but I am glad Gavin said it; and now Babbie admired something in him that deserved admiration. His faith, no doubt, made her a better woman.

"I admit that I would rather tell you nothing just now," she said, gratefully. "You

are sure you will never say again that you don't understand me?"

"Quite sure," said Gavin, bravely. "And by-and-by you will offer to tell me of your free will?"

"Oh, don't let us think of the future," answered Babbie. "Let us be happy for the moment."

This had been the Egyptian's philosophy always, but it was ill-suited for Auld Licht ministers, as one of them was presently to discover.

"I want to make one confession, though," Babbie continued, almost reluctantly. "When you were so nasty a little while ago, I didn't go back to Nanny's. I stood watching you from behind a tree, and then, for an excuse to come back, I—I poured out the water. Yes, and I told you another lie. I really came back to admit that it was all my fault, if I could not get you to say that it was yours. I am so glad you gave in first."

She was very near him, and the tears had

not yet dried on her eyes. They were laughing eyes, eyes in distress, imploring eyes. Her pale face, smiling, sad, dimpled, yet entreating forgiveness, was the one prominent thing in the world to him just then. He wanted to kiss her. He would have done it as soon as her eyes rested on his, but she continued without regarding him :

" How mean that sounds ! Oh, if I were a man I should wish to be everything that I am not, and nothing that I am. I should scorn to be a liar, I should choose to be open in all things, I should try to fight the world honestly. But I am only a woman, and so— well, that is the kind of man I should like to marry."

" A minister may be all these things," said Gavin, breathlessly.

" The man I could love," Babbie went on, not heeding him, almost forgetting that he was there, " must not spend his days in idleness as the men I know do."

"I do not."

"He must be brave, no mere worker among others, but a leader of men."

"All ministers are."

"Who makes his influence felt."

"Assuredly."

"And takes the side of the weak against the strong, even though the strong be in the right."

"Always my tendency."

"A man who has a mind of his own, and having once made it up stands to it in defiance even of——"

"Of his session."

"Of the world. He must understand me."

"I do."

"And be my master."

"It is his lawful position in the house."

"He must not yield to my coaxing or tempers."

"It would be weakness."

"But compel me to do his bidding; yes, even thrash me if——"

"If you won't listen to reason. Babbie," cried Gavin, "I am that man!"

Here the inventory abruptly ended, and these two people found themselves staring at each other, as if of a sudden they had heard something dreadful. I do not know how long they stood thus, motionless and horrified. I cannot tell even which stirred first. All I know is that almost simultaneously they turned from each other and hurried out of the wood in opposite directions.

CHAPTER XX.

END OF THE STATE OF INDECISION.

Long before I had any thought of writing this story, I had told it so often to my little maid that she now knows some of it better than I. If you saw me looking up from my paper to ask her, "What was it that Birse said to Jean about the minister's flowers?" or, "Where was Hendry Munn hidden on the night of the riots?" and heard her confident answers, you would conclude that she had been in the thick of these events, instead of born many years after them. I mention this now because I have reached a point where her memory contradicts mine. She maintains that Rob Dow was told of the meeting in the wood by the two boys whom it disturbed, while my own impression is that he was a witness of it. If she is right, Rob must have succeeded in frightening the boys into telling no

other person, for certainly the scandal did not spread in Thrums. After all, however, it is only important to know that Rob did learn of the meeting. Its first effect was to send him sullenly to the drink.

Many a time since these events have I pictured what might have been their upshot had Dow confided their discovery to me. Had I suspected why Rob was grown so dour again, Gavin's future might have been very different. I was meeting Rob now and again in the glen, asking, with an affected carelessness he did not bottom, for news of the little minister, but what he told me was only the gossip of the town; and what I should have known, that Thrums might never know it, he kept to himself. I suppose he feared to speak to Gavin, who made several efforts to reclaim him, but without avail.

Yet Rob's heart opened for a moment to one man, or rather was forced open by that man. A few days after the meeting at the well, Rob was bringing the smell of whisky with him down

Banker's Close when he ran against a famous staff, with which the doctor pinned him to the wall.

"Ay," said the outspoken doctor, looking contemptuously into Rob's bleary eyes, "so this is what your conversion amounts to? Faugh! Rob Dow, if you were half a man the very thought of what Mr. Dishart has done for you would make you run past the public-houses."

"It's the thocht o' him that sends me running to them," growled Rob, knocking down the staff. "Let me alane."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded McQueen, hooking him this time.

"Speir at himsel'; speir at the woman."

"What woman?"

"Take your staff out o' my neck."

"Not till you tell me why you, of all people, are speaking against the minister."

Torn by a desire for a confidant and loyalty to Gavin, Rob was already in a fury.

"Say again," he burst forth, "that I was

speaking agin the minister and I'll practise on you what I'm awid to do to her."

"Who is she?"

"Wha's wha?"

"The woman whom the minister——"

"I said nothing about a woman," said poor Rob, alarmed for Gavin. "Doctor, I'm ready to swear afore a bailie that I never saw them thegither at the Kaims."

"The Kaims!" exclaimed the doctor, suddenly enlightened. "Pooh! you only mean the Egyptian. Rob, make your mind easy about this. I know why he met her there."

"Do you ken that she has bewitched him; do you ken I saw him trying to put his arms round her; do you ken they have a trysting-place in Caddam wood?"

This came from Rob in a rush, and he would fain have called it all back.

"I'm drunk, doctor, roaring drunk," he said, hastily, "and it wasna the minister I saw ava; it was another man."

Nothing more could the doctor draw from Rob, but he had heard sufficient to smoke some pipes on. Like many who pride themselves on being recluses, McQueen loved the gossip that came to him uninvited; indeed, he opened his mouth to it as greedily as any man in Thrums. He respected Gavin, however, too much to find this new dish palatable, and so his researches to discover whether other Auld Lichts shared Rob's fears were conducted with caution. "Is there no word of your minister's getting a wife yet?" he asked several, but only got for answers, "There's word o' a Glasgow leddy's sending him baskets o' flowers," or "He has his een open, but he's taking his time; ay, he's looking for the blade o' corn in the stack o' chaff."

This convinced McQueen that the congregation knew nothing of the Egyptian, but it did not satisfy him, and he made an opportunity of inviting Gavin into the surgery. It was, to the doctor, the cosiest nook in his house, but

to me and many others a room that smelled of hearses. On the top of the pipes and tobacco tins that littered the table there usually lay a death certificate, placed there deliberately by the doctor to scare his sister, who had a passion for putting the surgery to rights.

"By the way," McQueen said, after he and Gavin had talked a little while, "did I ever advise you to smoke?"

"It is your usual form of salutation," Gavin answered, laughing. "But I don't think you ever supplied me with a reason."

"I daresay not. I am too experienced a doctor to cheapen my prescriptions in that way. However, here is one good reason. I have noticed, sir, that at your age a man is either a slave to a pipe or to a woman. Do you want me to lend you a pipe now?"

"Then I am to understand," asked Gavin, slyly, "that your locket came into your possession in your pre-smoking days, and that you merely wear it from habit?"

"Tuts!" answered the doctor, buttoning his coat. "I told you there was nothing in the locket. If there is, I have forgotten what it is."

"You are a hopeless old bachelor, I see," said Gavin, unaware that the doctor was probing him. He was surprised next moment to find McQueen in the ecstasies of one who has won a rubber.

"Now, then," cried the jubilant doctor, "as you have confessed so much, tell me all about her. Name and address, please."

"Confess! What have I confessed?"

"It won't do, Mr. Dishart, for even your face betrays you No, no, I am an old bird, but I have not forgotten the ways of the fledgings. 'Hopeless bachelor,' sir, is a sweetmeat in every young man's mouth until of a sudden he finds it sour, and that means the banns. When is it to be?"

"We must find the lady first," said the minister, uncomfortably.

"You tell me, in spite of that face, that you have not fixed on her?"

"The difficulty, I suppose, would be to persuade her to fix on me."

"Not a bit of it. But you admit there is some one?"

"Who would have me?"

"You are wriggling out of it. Is it the banker's daughter?"

"No," Gavin cried.

"I hear you have walked up the back-wynd with her three times this week. The town is in a ferment about it."

"She is a great deal in the back-wynd."

"Fiddle-de-dee! I am oftener in the back-wynd than you, and I never meet her there."

"That is curious."

"No, it isn't, but never mind. Perhaps you have fallen to Miss Pennycuick's piano? Did you hear it going as we passed the house?"

"She seems always to be playing on her piano."

"Not she; but you are supposed to be musical, and so when she sees you from her window she begins to thump. If I am in the School-wynd and hear the piano going, I know you will turn the corner immediately. However, I am glad to hear it is not Miss Pennycuick. Then it is the factor at the Spittal's lassie? Well done, sir. You should arrange to have the wedding at the same time as the old earl's, which comes off in summer, I believe."

"One foolish marriage is enough in a day, doctor."

"Eh? You call him a fool for marrying a young wife? Well, no doubt he is, but he would have been a bigger fool to marry an old one. However, it is not Lord Rintoul we are discussing, but Gavin Dishart. I suppose you know that the factor's lassie is an heiress?"

"And, therefore, would scorn me."

"Try her," said the doctor, drily. "Her father and mother, as I know, married on a ten-pound note. But if I am wrong again, I must adopt the popular view in Thrums. It is a Glasgow lady after all? Man, you needn't look indignant at hearing that the people are discussing your intended. You can no more stop it than a doctor's orders could keep Lang Tammas out of church. They have discovered that she sends you flowers twice every week."

"They never reach me," answered Gavin, then remembered the holly and winced.

"Some," persisted the relentless doctor, "even speak of your having been seen together; but of course, if she is a Glasgow lady, that is a mistake."

"Where did they see us?" asked Gavin, with a sudden trouble in his throat.

"You are shaking," said the doctor, keenly, "like a medical student at his first operation. But as for the story that you and the lady have

been seen together, I can guess how it arose. Do you remember that gypsy girl?"

The doctor had begun by addressing the fire, but he suddenly wheeled round and fired his question in the minister's face. Gavin, however, did not even blink.

"Why should I have forgotten her?" he replied, coolly.

"Oh, in the stress of other occupations. But it was your getting the money from her at the Kaims for Nanny that I was to speak of. Absurd though it seems, I think some dotard must have seen you and her at the Kaims, and mistaken her for the lady.

McQueen flung himself back in his chair to enjoy this joke.

"Fancy mistaking that woman for a lady!" he said to Gavin, who had not laughed with him.

"I think Nanny has some justification for considering her a lady," the minister said, firmly.

"Well, I grant that. But what made me guffaw was a vision of the harum-scarum, devil-may-care little Egyptian mistress of an Auld Licht manse!"

"She is neither harum-scarum nor devil-may-care," Gavin answered, without heat, for he was no longer a distracted minister. "You don't understand her as I do."

"No, I seem to understand her differently."

"What do you know of her?"

"That is just it," said the doctor, irritated by Gavin's coolness. "I know she saved Nanny from the poorhouse, but I don't know where she got the money. I know she can talk fine English when she chooses, but I don't know where she learned it. I know she heard that the soldiers were coming to Thrums before they knew of their destination themselves, but I don't know who told her. You who understand her can doubtless explain these matters?"

"She offered to explain them to me," Gavin answered, still unmoved, "but I forbade her."

"Why?"

"It is no business of yours, doctor. Forgive me for saying so."

"In Thrums," replied McQueen, "a minister's business is everybody's business. I have often wondered who helped her to escape from the soldiers that night. Did she offer to explain that to you?"

"She did not."

"Perhaps," said the doctor, sharply, "because it was unnecessary?"

"That was the reason."

"You helped her to escape?"

"I did."

"And you are not ashamed of it?"

"I am not."

"Why were you so anxious to screen her?"

"She saved some of my people from gaol."

"Which was more than they deserved."

"I have always understood that you concealed two of them in your own stable."

"Maybe I did," the doctor had to allow.

"But I took my stick to them next morning. Besides, they were Thrums folk, while you had never set eyes on that imp of mischief before."

"I cannot sit here, doctor, and hear her called names," Gavin said, rising, but McQueen gripped him by the shoulder.

"For pity's sake, sir, don't let us wrangle like a pair of women. I brought you here to speak my mind to you, and speak it I will. I warn you, Mr. Dishart, that you are being watched. You have been seen meeting this lassie in Caddam as well as at the Kaims."

"Let the whole town watch, doctor. I have met her openly."

"And why? Oh, don't make Nanny your excuse."

"I won't. I met her because I love her."

"Are you mad?" cried McQueen. "You speak as if you would marry her."

"Yes," replied Gavin, determinedly, "and I mean to do it."

The doctor flung up his hands.

"I give you up," he said, raging. "I give you up. Think of your congregation, man."

"I have been thinking of them, and as soon as I have a right to do so I shall tell them what I have told you."

"And until you tell them I will keep your madness to myself, for I warn you that, as soon as they do know, there will be a vacancy in the Auld Licht kirk of Thrums."

"She is a woman," said Gavin, hesitating, though preparing to go, "of whom any minister might be proud."

"She is a woman," the doctor roared, "that no congregation would stand. Oh, if you will go, there is your hat."

Perhaps Gavin's face was whiter as he left the house than when he entered it, but there was no other change. Those who were watching him decided that he was looking much as usual, except that his mouth was shut very firm, from which they concluded that he had been taking the doctor to task for smoking. They also

noted that he returned to McQueen's house within half an hour after leaving it, but remained no time.

Some explained this second visit by saying that the minister had forgotten his cravat, and had gone back for it. What really sent him back, however, was his conscience. He had said to McQueen that he helped Babbie to escape from the soldiers because of her kindness to his people, and he returned to own that it was a lie.

Gavin knocked at the door of the surgery, but entered without waiting for a response. McQueen was no longer stamping through the room, red and furious. He had even laid aside his pipe. He was sitting back in his chair, looking half-mournfully, half-contemptuously, at something in his palm. His hand closed instinctively when he heard the door open, but Gavin had seen that the object was an open locket.

"It was only your reference to the thing," the detected doctor said, with a grim laugh,

"that made me open it. Forty years ago, sir, I—— Phew! it is forty-two years, and I have not got over it yet." He closed the locket with a snap. "I hope you have come back, Dishart, to speak more rationally?"

Gavin told him why he had come back, and the doctor said he was a fool for his pains.

"Is it useless, Dishart, to make another appeal to you?"

"Quite useless, doctor," Gavin answered, promptly. "My mind is made up at last."

CHAPTER XXI.

NIGHT—MARGARET—FLASHING OF A LANTERN.

That evening the little minister sat silently in his parlour. Darkness came, and with it weavers rose heavy-eyed from their looms, sleepy children sought their mothers, and the gate of the field above the manse fell forward to let cows pass to their byre; the great Bible was produced in many homes, and the ten o'clock bell clanged its last word to the night. Margaret had allowed the lamp to burn low. Thinking that her boy slept, she moved softly to his side and spread her shawl over his knees. He had forgotten her. The doctor's warnings scarcely troubled him. He was Babbie's lover. The mystery of her was only a veil hiding her from other men, and he was looking through it upon the face of his beloved.

It was a night of long ago, but can you not

see my dear Margaret still as she bends over her son? Not twice in many days dared the minister snatch a moment's sleep from grey morning to midnight, and, when this did happen, he jumped up by-and-by in shame, to revile himself for an idler and ask his mother wrathfully why she had not tumbled him out of his chair? To-night Margaret was divided between a desire to let him sleep and a fear of his self-reproach when he awoke; and so, perhaps, the tear fell that roused him.

"I did not like to waken you," Margaret said, apprehensively. "You must have been very tired, Gavin?"

"I was not sleeping, mother," he said, slowly. "I was only thinking."

"Ah, Gavin, you never rise from your loom. It is hardly fair that your hands should be so full of other people's troubles."

"They only fill one hand, mother; I carry the people's joys in the other hand, and that

keeps me erect, like a woman between her pan and pitcher. I think the joys have outweighed the sorrows since we came here."

"It has been all joy to me, Gavin, for you never tell me of the sorrows. An old woman has no right to be so happy."

"Old woman, mother!" said Gavin. But his indignation was vain. Margaret was an old woman. I made her old before her time.

"As for these terrible troubles," he went on, "I forget them the moment I enter the garden and see you at your window. And, maybe, I keep some of the joys from you as well as the troubles."

Words about Babbie leaped to his mouth, but with an effort he restrained them. He must not tell his mother of her until Babbie of her free will had told him all there was to tell.

"I have been a selfish woman, Gavin."

"You selfish, mother!" Gavin said, smiling. "Tell me when you did not think of others before yourself?"

"Always, Gavin. Has it not been selfishness to hope that you would never want to bring another mistress to the manse? Do you remember how angry you used to be in Glasgow when I said that you would marry some day?"

"I remember," Gavin said, sadly.

"Yes; you used to say, 'Don't speak of such a thing, mother, for the horrid thought of it is enough to drive all the Hebrew out of my head.' Was not that lightning just now?"

"I did not see it. What a memory you have, mother, for all the boyish things I said."

"I can't deny," Margaret admitted with a sigh, "that I liked to hear you speak in that way, though I knew you would go back on your word. You see, you have changed already."

"How, mother?" asked Gavin, surprised.

"You said just now that those were boyish speeches. Gavin, I can't understand the mothers

who are glad to see their sons married; though I had a dozen I believe it would be a wrench to lose one of them. It would be different with daughters. You are laughing, Gavin!"

"Yes, at your reference to daughters. Would you not have preferred me to be a girl?"

"'Deed I would not," answered Margaret, with tremendous conviction. "Gavin, every woman on earth, be she rich or poor, good or bad, offers up one prayer about her firstborn, and that is, 'May he be a boy!'"

"I think you are wrong, mother. The banker's wife told me that there is nothing for which she thanks the Lord so much as that all her children are girls."

"May she be forgiven for that, Gavin!" exclaimed Margaret; "though she maybe did right to put the best face on her humiliation. No, no, there are many kinds of women in the world, but there never was one yet that didn't want to begin with a laddie. You can speculate

about a boy so much more than about a girl. Gavin, what is it a woman thinks about the day her son is born? yes, and the day before too? She is picturing him a grown man, and a slip of a lassie taking him from her. Ay, that is where the lassies have their revenge on the mothers. I remember as if it were this morning a Harvie fishwife patting your head and asking who was your sweetheart, and I could never thole the woman again. We were at the door of the cottage, and I mind I gripped you up in my arms. You had on a tartan frock with a sash and diamond socks. When I look back, Gavin, it seems to me that you have shot up from that frock to manhood in a single hour."

"There are not many mothers like you," Gavin said, laying his hand fondly on Margaret's shoulder.

"There are many better mothers, but few such sons. It is easily seen why God could not afford me another. Gavin, I am sure that was lightning."

"I think it was; but don't be alarmed, mother."

"I am never frightened when you are with me."

"And I always will be with you."

"Ah, if you were married——"

"Do you think," asked Gavin, indignantly, "that it would make any difference to you?"

Margaret did not answer. She knew what a difference it would make.

"Except," continued Gavin, with a man's obtuseness, "that you would have a daughter as well as a son to love you and take care of you."

Margaret could have told him that men give themselves away needlessly who marry for the sake of their mother, but all she said was—

"Gavin, I see you can speak more composedly of marrying now than you spoke a year ago. If I did not know better, I should think a Thrums young lady had got hold of you."

It was a moment before Gavin replied; then he said, gaily—

"Really, mother, the way the best of women speak of each other is lamentable. You say I should be better married, and then you take for granted that every marriageable woman in the neighbourhood is trying to kidnap me. I am sure you did not take my father by force in that way."

He did not see that Margaret trembled at the mention of his father. He never knew that she was many times pining to lay her head upon his breast and tell him of me. Yet I cannot but believe that she always shook when Adam Dishart was spoken of between them. I cannot think that the long-cherishing of the secret which was hers and mine kept her face steady when that horror suddenly confronted her as now. Gavin would have suspected much had he ever suspected anything.

"I know," Margaret said, courageously, "that you would be better married; but when it comes

to selecting the woman I grow fearful. Oh, Gavin!" she said, earnestly, "it is an awful thing to marry the wrong man!"

Here in a moment had she revealed much, though far from all, and there must have been many such moments between them. But Gavin was thinking of his own affairs.

"You mean the wrong woman, don't you, mother?" he said, and she hastened to agree. But it was the wrong man she meant.

"The difficulty, I suppose, is to hit upon the right one?" Gavin said, blithely.

"To know which is the right one in time," answered Margaret, solemnly. "But I am saying nothing against the young ladies of Thrums, Gavin. Though I have scarcely seen them, I know there are good women among them. Jean says——"

"I believe, mother," Gavin interposed, reproachfully, "that you have been questioning Jean about them?"

"Just because I was afraid—I mean because I fancied—you might be taking a liking to one of them."

"And what is Jean's verdict?"

"She says every one of them would jump at you, like a bird at a berry."

"But the berry cannot be divided. How would Miss Pennycuick please you, mother?"

"Gavin!" cried Margaret, in consternation, "you don't mean to—— But you are laughing at me again."

"Then there is the banker's daughter?"

"I can't thole her."

"Why, I question if you ever set eyes on her, mother."

"Perhaps not, Gavin; but I have suspected her ever since she offered to become one of your tract distributors."

"The doctor," said Gavin, not ill-pleased, "was saying that either of these ladies would suit me."

"What business has he," asked Margaret,

vindictively, "to put such thoughts into your head?"

"But he only did as you are doing. Mother, I see you will never be satisfied without selecting the woman for me yourself."

"Ay, Gavin," said Margaret, earnestly; "and I question if I should be satisfied even then. But I am sure I should be a better guide to you than Dr. McQueen is."

"I am convinced of that. But I wonder what sort of woman would content you?"

"Whoever pleased you, Gavin, would content me," Margaret ventured to maintain. "You would only take to a clever woman."

"She must be nearly as clever as you, mother."

"Hoots, Gavin," said Margaret, smiling, "I'm not to be caught with chaff. I am a stupid, ignorant woman."

"Then I must look out for a stupid, ignorant woman, for that seems to be the kind I like," answered Gavin, of whom I may

confess here something that has to be told sooner or later. It is this: he never realised that Babbie was a great deal cleverer than himself. Forgive him, you who read, if you have any tolerance for the creature, man.

"She will be terribly learned in languages," pursued Margaret, "so that she may follow you in your studies, as I have never been able to do."

"Your face has helped me more than Hebrew, mother," replied Gavin. "I will give her no marks for languages."

"At any rate," Margaret insisted, "she must be a grand housekeeper, and very thrifty."

"As for that," Gavin said, faltering a little, "one can't expect it of a mere girl."

"I should expect it," maintained his mother.

"No, no; but she would have you," said Gavin, happily, "to teach her housekeeping."

"It would be a pleasant occupation to me,

that," Margaret admitted. "And she would soon learn; she would be so proud of her position as mistress of a manse."

"Perhaps," Gavin said, doubtfully. He had no doubt on the subject in his college days.

"And we can take for granted," continued his mother, "that she is a lassie of fine character."

"Of course," said Gavin, holding his head high, as if he thought the doctor might be watching him.

"I have thought," Margaret went on, "that there was a great deal of wisdom in what you said at that last marriage in the manse, the one where, you remember, the best man and the bridesmaid joined hands instead of the bride and bridegroom."

"What did I say?" asked the little minister, with misgivings.

"That there was great danger when people married out of their own rank of life."

"Oh—ah—well, of course, that would depend on circumstances."

"They were wise words, Gavin. There was the sermon, too, that you preached a month or two ago against marrying into other denominations. Jean told me that it greatly impressed the congregation. It is a sad sight, as you said, to see an Auld Licht lassie changing her faith because her man belongs to the U. P.'s."

"Did I say that?"

"You did, and it so struck Jean that she told me she would rather be an old maid for life, 'the which,' she said, 'is a dismal prospect,' than marry out of the Auld Licht kirk."

"Perhaps that was a rather narrow view I took, mother. After all, the fitting thing is that the wife should go with her husband; especially if it is he that is the Auld Licht."

"I don't hold with narrowness myself, Gavin," Margaret said, with an effort, "and

I admit that there are many respectable persons in the other denominations. But though a weaver might take a wife from another kirk without much scandal, an Auld Licht minister's madam must be Auld Licht born and bred. The congregation would expect no less. I doubt if they would be sure of her if she came from some other Auld Licht kirk. 'Deed, though she came from our own kirk I'm thinking the session would want to catechise her. Ay, and if all you tell me of Lang Tammas be true (for, as you know, I never spoke to him), I warrant he would catechise the session."

"I would brook no interference from my session," said Gavin, knitting his brows, "and I do not consider it necessary that a minister's wife should have been brought up in his denomination. Of course she would join it. We must make allowance, mother, for the thousands of young women who live in places where there is no Auld Licht kirk."

"You can pity them, Gavin," said Margaret, "without marrying them. A minister has his congregation to think of."

"So the doctor says," interposed her son.

"Then it was just like his presumption!" cried Margaret. "A minister should marry to please himself."

"Decidedly he should," Gavin agreed, eagerly, "and the bounden duty of the congregation is to respect and honour his choice. If they forget that duty, his is to remind them of it."

"Ah, well, Gavin," said Margaret, confidently, "your congregation are so fond of you that your choice would doubtless be theirs. Jean tells me that even Lang Tammas, though he is so obstinate, has a love for you passing the love of woman. These were her words. Jean is more sentimental than you might think."

"I wish he would show his love," said Gavin, "by contradicting me less frequently."

"You have Rob Dow to weigh against him."

"No; I cannot make out what has come over Rob lately. He is drinking heavily again, and avoiding me. The lightning is becoming very vivid."

"Yes, and I hear no thunder. There is another thing, Gavin. I am one of those that like to sit at home, but if you had a wife she would visit the congregation. A truly religious wife would be a great help to you."

"Religious," Gavin repeated slowly. "Yes, but some people are religious without speaking of it. If a woman is good she is religious. A good woman who has been, let us say, foolishly brought up, only needs to be shown the right way to tread it. Mother, I question if any man, minister or layman, ever yet fell in love because the woman was thrifty, or clever, or went to church twice on Sabbath."

"I believe that is true," Margaret said, "and I would not have it otherwise. But it is

an awful thing, Gavin, as you said from the pulpit two weeks ago, to worship only at a beautiful face."

"You think too much about what I say in the pulpit, mother," Gavin said, with a sigh, "though of course a man who fell in love merely with a face would be a contemptible creature. Yet I see that women do not understand how beauty affects a man."

"Yes, yes, my boy—oh, indeed, they do," said Margaret, who on some matters knew far more than her son.

Twelve o'clock struck, and she rose to go to bed, alarmed lest she should not waken early in the morning. "But I am afraid I shan't sleep," she said, "if that lightning continues."

"It is harmless," Gavin answered, going to the window. He started back next moment, and crying, "Don't look out, mother," hastily pulled down the blind.

"Why, Gavin," Margaret said in fear, "you look as if it had struck you."

"Oh, no," Gavin answered, with a forced laugh, and he lit her lamp for her.

But it had struck him, though it was not lightning. It was the flashing of a lantern against the window to attract his attention, and the holder of the lantern was Babbie.

"Good-night, mother."

"Good-night, Gavin. Don't sit up any later."

CHAPTER XXII.

LOVERS.

Only something terrible, Gavin thought, could have brought Babbie to him at such an hour; yet when he left his mother's room it was to stand motionless on the stair, waiting for a silence in the manse that would not come. A house is never still in darkness to those who listen intently; there is a whispering in distant chambers, an unearthly hand presses the snib of the window, the latch rises. Ghosts were created when the first man woke in the night.

Now Margaret slept. Two hours earlier, Jean, sitting on the salt-bucket, had read the chapter with which she always sent herself to bed. In honour of the little minister she had begun her Bible afresh when he came to Thrums, and was progressing through it, a chapter a night, sighing, perhaps, on washing

days at a long chapter, such as Exodus twelfth, but never making two of it. The kitchen wag-at-the-wall clock was telling every room in the house that she had neglected to shut her door. As Gavin felt his way down the dark stair, awakening it into protest at every step, he had a glimpse of the pendulum's shadow running back and forward on the hearth; he started back from another shadow on the lobby wall, and then seeing it start too, knew it for his own. He opened the door and passed out unobserved; it was as if the sounds and shadows that filled the manse were too occupied with their game to mind an interloper.

"Is that you?" he said to a bush, for the garden was in semi-darkness. Then the lantern's flash met him, and he saw the Egyptian in the summer-seat.

"At last!" she said, reproachfully. "Evidently a lantern is a poor door-bell."

"What is it?" Gavin asked, in suppressed excitement, for the least he expected to hear

was that she was again being pursued for her share in the riot. The tremor in his voice surprised her into silence, and he thought she faltered because what she had to tell him was so woeful. So, in the darkness of the summer-seat, he kissed her, and she might have known that with that kiss the little minister was hers for ever.

Now Babbie had been kissed before, but never thus, and she turned from Gavin, and would have liked to be alone, for she had begun to know what love was, and the flash that revealed it to her laid bare her own shame, so that her impulse was to hide herself from her lover. But of all this Gavin was unconscious, and he repeated his question. The lantern was swaying in her hand, and when she turned fearfully to him its light fell on his face, and she saw how alarmed he was.

"I am going away back to Nanny's," she said suddenly, and rose cowed, but he took her hand and held her.

"Babbie," he said, huskily, "tell me what has happened to bring you here at this hour."

She sought to pull her hand from him, but could not.

"How you are trembling!" he whispered. "Babbie," he cried, "something terrible has happened to you, but do not fear. Tell me what it is, and then—then I will take you to my mother: yes, I will take you now."

The Egyptian would have given all she had in the world to be able to fly from him then, that he might never know her as she was, but it could not be, and so she spoke out remorselessly. If her voice had become hard, it was a new-born scorn of herself that made it so.

"You are needlessly alarmed," she said; "I am not at all the kind of person who deserves sympathy or expects it. There is nothing wrong. I am staying with Nanny overnight, and only came to Thrums to amuse myself. I chased your policeman down the

Roods with my lantern, and then came here to amuse myself with you. That is all."

"It was nothing but a love of mischief that brought you here?" Gavin asked, sternly, after an unpleasant pause.

"Nothing," the Egyptian answered, recklessly.

"I could not have believed this of you," the minister said; "I am ashamed of you."

"I thought," Babbie retorted, trying to speak lightly until she could get away from him, "that you would be glad to see me. Your last words in Caddam seemed to justify that idea."

"I am very sorry to see you," he answered, reproachfully.

"Then I will go away at once," she said, stepping out of the summer-seat.

"Yes," he replied, "you must go at once."

"Then I won't," she said, turning back defiantly. "I know what you are to say: that the Thrums people would be shocked if they knew I

was here; as if I cared what the Thrums people think of me."

"I care what they think of you," Gavin said, as if that were decisive, "and I tell you I will not allow you to repeat this freak."

"You 'will not allow me,'" echoed Babbie, almost enjoying herself, despite her sudden loss of self-respect.

"I will not," Gavin said, resolutely. "Henceforth you must do as I think fit."

"Since when have you taken command of me?" demanded Babbie.

"Since a minute ago," Gavin replied, "when you let me kiss you."

"Let you!" exclaimed Babbie, now justly incensed. "You did it yourself. I was very angry."

"No, you were not."

"I am not allowed to say that even?" asked the Egyptian. "Tell me something I may say, then, and I will repeat it after you."

"I have something to say to you," Gavin

told her, after a moment's reflection; "yes, and there is something I should like to hear you repeat after me, but not to-night."

"I don't want to hear what it is," Babbie said, quickly, but she knew what it was, and even then, despite the new pain at her heart, her bosom swelled with pride because this man still loved her. Now she wanted to run away with his love for her before he could take it from her, and then realising that this parting must be for ever, a great desire filled her to hear him put that kiss into words, and she said, faltering:

"You can tell me what it is if you like."

"Not to-night," said Gavin.

"To-night, if at all," the gypsy almost entreated.

"To-morrow, at Nanny's," answered Gavin, decisively: and this time he remembered without dismay that the morrow was the Sabbath.

In the fairy tale the beast suddenly drops his skin and is a prince, and I believe it seemed

to Babbie that some such change had come over this man, her plaything.

"Your lantern is shining on my mother's window," were the words that woke her from this discovery, and then she found herself yielding the lantern to him. She became conscious vaguely that a corresponding change was taking place in herself.

"You spoke of taking me to your mother," she said, bitterly.

"Yes," he answered at once, "to-morrow;" but she shook her head, knowing that to-morrow he would be wiser.

"Give me the lantern," she said, in a low voice, "I am going back to Nanny's now."

"Yes," he said, "we must set out now, but I can carry the lantern."

"You are not coming with me!" she exclaimed, shaking herself free of his hand.

"I am coming," he replied, calmly, though he was not calm. "Take my arm, Babbie."

She made a last effort to free herself from

bondage, crying passionately, "I will not let you come."

"When I say I am coming," Gavin answered between his teeth, "I mean that I am coming, and so let that be an end of this folly. Take my arm."

"I think I hate you," she said, retreating from him.

"Take my arm," he repeated, and, though her breast was rising rebelliously, she did as he ordered, and so he escorted her from the garden. At the foot of the field she stopped, and thought to frighten him by saying, "What would the people say if they saw you with me now?"

"It does not much matter what they would say," he answered, still keeping his teeth together as if doubtful of their courage. "As for what they would do, that is certain; they would put me out of my church."

"And it is dear to you?"

"Dearer than life."

"You told me long ago that your mother's heart would break if——"

"Yes, I am sure it would."

They had begun to climb the fields, but she stopped him with a jerk.

"Go back, Mr. Dishart," she implored, clutching his arm with both hands. "You make me very unhappy for no purpose. Oh, why should you risk so much for me?"

"I cannot have you wandering here alone at midnight," Gavin answered, gently.

"That is nothing to me," she said, eagerly, but no longer resenting his air of proprietorship.

"You will never do it again if I can prevent it."

"But you cannot," she said, sadly. "Oh, yes, you can, Mr. Dishart. If you will turn back now I shall promise never to do anything again without first asking myself whether it would seem right to you. I know I acted very wrongly to-night."

"Only thoughtlessly," he said.

"Then have pity on me," she besought him, "and go back. If I have only been thoughtless, how can you punish me thus? Mr. Dishart," she entreated, her voice breaking, "if you were to suffer for this folly of mine, do you think I could live?"

"We are in God's hands, dear," he answered, firmly, and he again drew her arm to him. So they climbed the first field, and were almost at the hill before either spoke again.

"Stop," Babbie whispered, crouching as she spoke; "I see some one crossing the hill."

"I have seen him for some time," Gavin answered, quietly; "but I am doing no wrong, and I will not hide."

The Egyptian had to walk on with him, and I suppose she did not think the less of him for that. Yet she said, warningly—

"If he sees you, all Thrums will be in an uproar before morning."

"I cannot help that," Gavin replied. "It is the will of God."

"To ruin you for my sins?"

"If He thinks fit."

The figure drew nearer, and with every step Babbie's distress doubled.

"We are walking straight to him," she whispered. "I implore you to wait here until he passes, if not for your own sake, for your mother's."

At that he wavered, and she heard his teeth sliding against each other, as if he could no longer clench them.

"But, no," he said, moving on again, "I will not be a skulker from any man. If it be God's wish that I should suffer for this, I must suffer."

"Oh, why," cried Babbie, beating her hands together in grief, "should you suffer for me?"

"You are mine," Gavin answered. Babbie gasped. "And if you act foolishly," he continued, "it is right that I should bear the brunt

of it. No, I will not let you go on alone; you are not fit to be alone. You need some one to watch over you and care for you and love you, and, if need be, to suffer with you."

"Turn back, dear, before he sees us."

"He has seen us."

Yes, I had seen them, for the figure on the hill was no other than the dominie of Glen Quharity. The park gate clicked as it swung to, and I looked up and saw Gavin and the Egyptian. My eyes should have found them sooner, but it was to gaze upon Margaret's home, while no one saw me, that I had trudged into Thrums so late, and by that time, I suppose, my eyes were of little service for seeing through. Yet, when I knew that of these two people suddenly beside me on the hill one was the little minister and the other a strange woman, I fell back from their side with dread before I could step forward and cry "Gavin!"

"I am Mr. Dishart," he answered, with a

composure that would not have served him for another sentence. He was more excited than I, for the "Gavin" fell harmlessly on him, while I had no sooner uttered it than there rushed through me the shame of being false to Margaret. It was the only time in my life that I forgot her in him, though he has ever stood next to her in my regard.

I looked from Gavin to the gypsy woman, and again from her to him, and she began to tell a lie in his interest. But she got no farther than "I met Mr. Dishart accid ——" when she stopped, ashamed. It was reverence for Gavin that checked the lie. Not every man has had such a compliment paid him.

"It is natural," Gavin said, slowly, "that you, sir, should wonder why I am here with this woman at such an hour, and you may know me so little as to think ill of me for it."

I did not answer, and he misunderstood my silence.

"No," he continued, in a harder voice, as if

I had asked him a question, "I will explain nothing to you. You are not my judge. If you would do me harm, sir, you have it in your power."

It was with these cruel words that Gavin addressed me. He did not know how cruel they were. The Egyptian, I think, must have seen that his suspicions hurt me, for she said, softly, with a look of appeal in her eyes—

"You are the schoolmaster in Glen Quharity? Then you will perhaps save Mr. Dishart the trouble of coming farther by showing me the way to old Nanny Webster's house at Windyghoul?"

"I have to pass the house at any rate," I answered eagerly, and she came quickly to my side.

I knew, though in the darkness I could see but vaguely, that Gavin was holding his head high and waiting for me to say my worst. I had not told him that I dared think no evil of

him, and he still suspected me. Now I would not trust myself to speak lest I should betray Margaret, and yet I wanted him to know that base doubts about him could never find a shelter in me. I am a timid man who long ago lost the glory of my life by it, and I was again timid when I sought to let Gavin see that my faith in him was unshaken. I lifted my bonnet to the gypsy, and asked her to take my arm. It was done clumsily, I cannot doubt, but he read my meaning and held out his hand to me. I had not touched it since he was three years old, and I trembled too much to give it the grasp I owed it. He and I parted without a word, but to the Egyptian he said, "To-morrow, dear, I will see you at Nanny's," and he was to kiss her, but I pulled her a step farther from him, and she put her hands over her face, crying, "No, no!"

If I asked her some questions between the hill and Windyghoul you must not blame me, for this was my affair as well as theirs. She

did not answer me; I know now that she did not hear me. But at the mud house she looked abruptly into my face, and said—

"You love him, too!"

I trudged to the school-house with these words for company, and it was less her discovery than her confession that tortured me. How much I slept that night you may guess.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CONTAINS A BIRTH, WHICH IS SUFFICIENT FOR ONE CHAPTER.

"The kirk bell will soon be ringing," Nanny said on the following morning, as she placed herself carefully on a stool, one hand holding her Bible and the other wandering complacently over her aged merino gown. "Ay, lassie, though you're only an Egyptian I would hae ta'en you wi' me to hear Mr. Duthie, but it's speiring ower muckle o' a woman to expect her to gang to the kirk in her ilka day claethes."

The Babbie of yesterday would have laughed at this, but the new Babbie sighed.

"I wonder you don't go to Mr. Dishart's church now, Nanny," she said, gently. "I am sure you prefer him."

"Babbie, Babbie," exclaimed Nanny, with spirit, "may I never be so far left to mysel' as to change my kirk just because I like another

minister better! It's easy seen, lassie, that you ken little o' religious questions."

"Very little," Babbie admitted, sadly.

"But dinna be so waeful about it," the old woman continued, kindly, "for that's no nane like you. Ay, and if you see muckle mair o' Mr. Dishart he'll soon cure your ignorance."

"I shall not see much more of him," Babbie answered, with averted head.

"The like o' you couldna expect it," Nanny said, simply, whereupon Babbie went to the window. "I had better be stepping," Nanny said, rising, "for I am aye late unless I'm on the hill by the time the bell begins. Ay, Babbie, I'm doubting my merino's no sair in the fashion?"

She looked down at her dress half despondently, and yet with some pride.

"It was fowerpence the yard, and no less," she went on, fondling the worn merino, "when we bocht it at Sam'l Curr's. Ay, but it has been turned sax times since syne."

She sighed, and Babbie came to her and put her arms round her, saying, "Nanny, you are a dear."

"I'm a gey auld-farrant looking dear, I doubt," said Nanny, ruefully.

"Now, Nanny," rejoined Babbie, "you are just wanting me to flatter you. You know the merino looks very nice."

"It's a guid merino, yet," admitted the old woman, "but, oh, Babbie, what does the material matter if the cut isna fashionable? It's fine, isn't it, to be in the fashion?"

She spoke so wistfully that, instead of smiling, Babbie kissed her.

"I am afraid to lay hand on the merino, Nanny, but give me off your bonnet and I'll make it ten years younger in as many minutes."

"Could you?" asked Nanny, eagerly, unloosening her bonnet-strings. "Mercy on me!" she had to add; "to think about altering bonnets on the Sabbath-day! Lassie, how could you propose sic a thing?"

"Forgive me, Nanny," Babbie replied, so meekly that the old woman looked at her curiously.

"I dinna understand what has come ower you," she said. "There's an unca difference in you since last nicht. I used to think you were mair like a bird than a lassie, but you've lost a' your daft capers o' singing and lauching, and I take ill wi't. Twa or three times I've catched you greeting. Babbie, what has come ower you?"

"Nothing, Nanny. I think I hear the bell."

Down in Thrums two kirk-officers had let their bells loose, waking echoes in Windyghoul as one dog in country parts sets all the others barking, but Nanny did not hurry off to church. Such a surprising notion had filled her head suddenly that she even forgot to hold her dress off the floor.

"Babbie," she cried, in consternation, "dinna tell me you've gotten ower fond o' Mr. Dishart."

"The like of me, Nanny!" the gypsy answered, with affected raillery, but there was a tear in her eye.

"It would be a wild, presumptious thing," Nanny said, "and him a grand minister, but——"

Babbie tried to look her in the face, but failed, and then all at once there came back to Nanny the days when she and her lover wandered the hill together.

"Ah, my dawtie," she cried, so tenderly, "what does it matter wha he is when you canna help it!"

Two frail arms went round the Egyptian, and Babbie rested her head on the old woman's breast. But do you think it could have happened had not Nanny loved a weaver two-score years before?

And now Nanny has set off for church and Babbie is alone in the mud house. Some will pity her not at all, this girl who was a dozen women in the hour, and all made of impulses

that would scarce stand still to be photographed. To attempt to picture her at any time until now would have been like chasing a spirit that changes to something else as your arms clasp it; yet she has always seemed a pathetic little figure to me. If I understand Babbie at all, it is, I think, because I loved Margaret, the only woman I have ever known well, and one whose nature was not, like the Egyptian's, complex, but most simple, as if God had told her only to be good. Throughout my life since she came into it she has been to me a glass in which many things are revealed that I could not have learned save through her, and something of all womankind, even of bewildering Babbie, I seem to know because I knew Margaret.

No woman is so bad but we may rejoice when her heart thrills to love, for then God has her by the hand. There is no love but this. She may dream of what love is, but it is only of a sudden that she knows. Babbie, who

was without a guide from her baby days, had dreamed but little of it, hearing its name given to another thing. She had been born wild and known no home; no one had touched her heart except to strike it; she had been educated, but never tamed; her life had been thrown strangely among those who were great in the world's possessions, but she was not of them. Her soul was in such darkness that she had never seen it; she would have danced away cynically from the belief that there is such a thing, and now all at once she had passed from disbelief to knowledge. Is not love God's doing? To Gavin He had given something of Himself, and the moment she saw it the flash lit her own soul.

It was but little of his Master that was in Gavin, but far smaller things have changed the current of human lives; the spider's thread that strikes our brow on a country road may do that. Yet this I will say, though I have no wish to cast the little minister on my

pages larger than he was, that he had some heroic hours in Thrums, of which one was when Babbie learned to love him. Until the moment when he kissed her she had only conceived him a quaint fellow whose life was a string of Sundays, but behold what she saw in him now. Evidently to his noble mind her mystery was only some misfortune, not of her making, and his was to be the part of leading her away from it into the happiness of the open life. He did not doubt her, for he loved, and to doubt is to dip love in the mire. She had been given to him by God, and he was so rich in her possession that the responsibility attached to the gift was not grievous. She was his, and no mortal man could part them. Those who looked askance at her were looking askance at him; in so far as she was wayward and wild, he was those things; so long as she remained strange to religion, the blame lay on him.

All this Babbie read in the Gavin of the

past night, and to her it was the book of love. What things she had known, said and done in that holy name! How shamefully have we all besmirched it! She had only known it as the most selfish of the passions, a brittle image that men consulted because it could only answer in the words they gave it to say. But here was a man to whom love was something better than his own desires leering on a pedestal. Such love as Babbie had seen hitherto made strong men weak, but this was a love that made a weak man strong. All her life, strength had been her idol, and the weakness that bent to her cajolery her scorn. But only now was it revealed to her that strength, instead of being the lusty child of passions, grows by grappling with and throwing them.

So Babbie loved the little minister for the best that she had ever seen in man. I shall be told that she thought far more of him than he deserved, forgetting the mean in the

worthy: but who that has had a glimpse of heaven will care to let his mind dwell henceforth on earth? Love, it is said, is blind, but love is not blind. It is an extra eye, which shows us what is most worthy of regard. To see the best is to see most clearly, and it is the lover's privilege.

Down in the Auld Licht kirk that forenoon Gavin preached a sermon in praise of woman, and up in the mud house in Windyghoul Babbie sat alone. But it was the Sabbath day to her: the first Sabbath in her life. Her discovery had frozen her mind for a time, so that she could only stare at it with eyes that would not shut; but that had been in the night. Already her love seemed a thing of years, for it was as old as herself, as old as the new Babbie. It was such a dear delight that she clasped it to her, and exulted over it because it was hers, and then she cried over it because she must give it up.

For Babbie must only look at this love and

then turn from it. My heart aches for the little Egyptian, but the Promised Land would have remained invisible to her had she not realised that it was only for others. That was the condition of her seeing.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE NEW WORLD, AND THE WOMAN WHO MAY NOT DWELL THEREIN.

Up here in the glen school-house after my pupils have straggled home, there comes to me at times, and so sudden that it may be while I am infusing my tea, a hot desire to write great books. Perhaps an hour afterwards I rise, beaten, from my desk, flinging all I have written into the fire (yet rescuing some of it on second thoughts), and curse myself as an ingle-nook man, for I see that one can only paint what he himself has felt, and in my passion I wish to have all the vices, even to being an impious man, that I may describe them better. For this may I be pardoned. It comes to nothing in the end, save that my tea is brackish.

Yet though my solitary life in the glen is cheating me of many experiences, more

helpful to a writer than to a Christian, it has not been so tame but that I can understand why Babbie cried when she went into Nanny's garden and saw the new world. Let no one who loves be called altogether unhappy. Even love unreturned has its rainbow, and Babbie knew that Gavin loved her. Yet she stood in woe among the stiff berry bushes, as one who stretches forth her hands to Love and sees him looking for her, and knows she must shrink from the arms she would lie in, and only call to him in a voice he cannot hear. This is not a love that is always bitter. It grows sweet with age. But could that dry the tears of the little Egyptian, who had only been a woman for a day?

Much was still dark to her. Of one obstacle that must keep her and Gavin ever apart she knew, and he did not, but had it been removed she would have given herself to him humbly, not in her own longing, but because he wanted her. "Behold what I am," she could have said to him then, and left the

rest to him, believing that her unworthiness would not drag him down, it would lose itself so readily in his strength. That Thrums could rise against such a man if he defied it, she did not believe; but she was to learn the truth presently from a child.

To most of us, I suppose, has come some shock that was to make us different men from that hour, and yet, how many days elapsed before something of the man we had been leapt up in us? Babbie thought she had buried her old impulsiveness, and then remembering that from the top of the field she might see Gavin returning from church, she hastened to the hill to look upon him from a distance. Before she reached the gate where I had met her and him, however, she stopped, distressed at her selfishness, and asked bitterly, "Why am I so different from other women; why should what is so easy to them be so hard to me?"

"Gavin, my beloved!" the Egyptian cried

in her agony, and the wind caught her words and flung them in the air, making sport of her.

She wandered westward over the bleak hill, and by-and-by came to a great slab called the Standing Stone, on which children often sit and muse until they see gay ladies riding by on palfreys—a kind of horse—and knights in glittering armour, and goblins, and fiery dragons, and other wonders now extinct, of which bare-legged laddies dream, as well as boys in socks. The Standing Stone is in the dyke that separates the hill from a fir wood, and it is the fairy-book of Thrums. If you would be a knight yourself, you must sit on it and whisper to it your desire.

Babbie came to the Standing Stone, and there was a little boy astride it. His hair stood up through holes in his bonnet, and he was very ragged and miserable.

"Why are you crying, little boy?" Babbie asked him, gently; but he did not look up, and the tongue was strange to him.

"How are you greeting so sair?" she asked.

"I'm no greeting very sair," he answered, turning his head from her that a woman might not see his tears. "I'm no greeting so sair but what I grat sairer when my mither died."

"When did she die?" Babbie inquired.

"Lang syne," he answered, still with averted face.

"What is your name?"

"Micah is my name. Rob Dow's my father."

"And have you no brothers nor sisters?" asked Babbie, with a fellow-feeling for him.

"Na, juist my father," he said.

"You should be the better laddie to him then. Did your mither no tell you to be that afore she died?"

"Ay," he answered, "she telled me aye to hide the bottle frae him when I could get haud

o't. She took me into the bed to make me promise that, and syne she died."

"Does your father drink?"

"He hauds mair than ony other man in Thrums," Micah replied, almost proudly.

"And he strikes you?" Babbie asked, compassionately.

"That's a lie," retorted the boy, fiercely. "Leastwise, he doesna strike me except when he's mortal, and syne I can jouk him."

"What are you doing there?"

"I'm wishing. It's a wishing stane."

"You are wishing your father wouldna drink."

"No, I'm no," answered Micah. "There was a lang time he didna drink, but the woman has sent him to it again. It's about her I'm wishing. I'm wishing she was in hell."

"What woman is it?" asked Babbie, shuddering.

"I dinna ken," Micah said, "but she's an ill ane."

"Did you never see her at your father's house?"

"Na; if he could get grip o' her he would break her ower his knee. I hearken to him saying that, when he's wild. He says she should be burned for a witch."

"But if he hates her," asked Babbie, "how can she have sic power ower him?"

"It's no him that she has haud o'," replied Micah, still looking away from her.

"Wha is it then?"

"It's Mr. Dishart."

Babbie was struck as if by an arrow from the wood. It was so unexpected that she gave a cry, and then for the first time Micah looked at her.

"How should that send your father to the drink?" she asked, with an effort.

"Because my father's michty fond o' him," answered Micah, staring strangely at her; "and when the folk ken about the woman, they'll stane the minister out o' Thrums."

The wood faded for a moment from the Egyptian's sight. When it came back, the boy had slid off the Standing Stone and was stealing away.

"Why do you run frae me?" Babbie asked, pathetically.

"I'm fleid at you," he gasped, coming to a standstill at a safe distance: "you're the woman!"

Babbie cowered before her little judge, and he drew nearer her slowly.

"What makes you think that?" she said.

It was a curious time for Babbie's beauty to be paid its most princely compliment.

"Because you're so bonny," Micah whispered across the dyke. Her tears gave him courage. "You micht gang awa," he entreated. "If you kent what a differ Mr. Dishart made in my father till you came, you would maybe gang awa. When he's roaring fou I have to sleep in the wood, and it's awfu' cauld. I'm doubting he'll kill me, woman, if you dinna gang awa."

Poor Babbie put her hand to her heart, but the innocent lad continued mercilessly—

"If ony shame comes to the minister, his auld mither'll die. How have you sic an ill will at the minister?"

Babbie held up her hands like a supplicant.

"I'll gie you my rabbit," Micah said, "if you'll gang awa. I've juist the ane." She shook her head, and, misunderstanding her, he cried, with his knuckles in his eye, "I'll gie you them baith, though I'm michty sweer to part wi' Spotty."

Then at last Babbie found her voice.

"Keep your rabbits, laddie," she said, "and greet no more. I'm gaen awa."

"And you'll never come back no more a' your life?" pleaded Micah.

"Never no more a' my life," repeated Babbie.

"And ye'll leave the minister alane for ever and ever?"

"For ever and ever."

Micah rubbed his face dry, and said, "Will

you let me stand on the Standing Stane and watch you gaen awa for ever and ever?"

At that a sob broke from Babbie's heart, and looking at her doubtfully Micah said—

"Maybe you're gey ill for what you've done?"

"Ay," Babbie answered, "I'm gey ill for what I've done."

A minute passed, and in her anguish she did not know that still she was standing at the dyke. Micah's voice roused her:

"You said you would gang awa, and you're no gaen."

Then Babbie went away. The boy watched her across the hill. He climbed the Standing Stone and gazed after her until she was but a coloured ribbon among the broom. When she disappeared into Windyghoul he ran home joyfully, and told his father what a good day's work he had done. Rob struck him for a fool for taking a gypsy's word, and warned him against speaking of the woman in Thrums.

But though Dow believed that Gavin continued to meet the Egyptian secretly, he was wrong. A sum of money for Nanny was sent to the minister, but he could guess only from whom it came. In vain did he search for Babbie. Some months passed and he gave up the search, persuaded that he should see her no more. He went about his duties with a drawn face that made many folk uneasy when it was stern, and pained them when it tried to smile. But to Margaret, though the effort was terrible, he was as he had ever been, and so no thought of a woman crossed her loving breast.

CHAPTER XXV.

BEGINNING OF THE TWENTY-FOUR HOURS.

I CAN tell still how the whole of the glen was engaged about the hour of noon on the fourth of August month; a day to be among the last forgotten by any of us, though it began as quietly as a roaring March. At the Spittal, between which and Thrums this is a halfway house, were gathered two hundred men in kilts, and many gentry from the neighbouring glens, to celebrate the earl's marriage, which was to take place on the morrow, and thither, too, had gone many of my pupils to gather gossip, at which girls of six are trustier hands than boys of twelve. Those of us, however, who were neither children nor of gentle blood, remained at home, the farmers more taken up with the want of rain, now become a calamity, than with an old man's wedding, and their women-folk wringing their hands for

rain also, yet finding time to marvel at the marriage's taking place at the Spittal instead of in England, of which the ignorant spoke vaguely as an estate of the bride's.

For my own part I could talk of the disastrous drouth with Waster Lunny as I walked over his parched fields, but I had not such cause as he to brood upon it by day and night; and the ins and outs of the earl's marriage were for discussing at a tea-table, where there were women to help one to conclusions, rather than for the reflections of a solitary dominie, who had seen neither bride nor bridegroom. So it must be confessed that when I might have been regarding the sky moodily, or at the Spittal, where a free table that day invited all, I was sitting in the school-house, heeling my left boot, on which I have always been a little hard.

I made small speed, not through lack of craft, but because one can no more drive in tackets properly than take cities unless he gives his whole mind to it; and half of mine was at the

Auld Licht manse. Since our meeting six months earlier on the hill I had not seen Gavin, but I had heard much of him, and of a kind to trouble me.

"I saw nothing queer about Mr. Dishart," was Waster Lunny's frequent story, "till I hearkened to Elspeth speaking about it to the lasses (for I'm the last Elspeth would tell onything to, though I'm her man), and syne I minded I had been noticing it for months. Elspeth says," he would go on, for he could no more forbear quoting his wife than complaining of her, "that the minister 'll listen to you nowadays wi' his een glaring at you as if he had a perfectly passionate interest in what you were telling him (though it may be only about a hen wi' the croup), and then, after all, he hasna heard a sylib. Ay, I listened to Elspeth saying that, when she thocht I was at the byre, and yet, would you believe it, when I says to her after lousing time, 'I've been noticing of late that the minister loses what a body tells him,' all she answers is 'Havers.' Tod, but women's provoking."

"I allow," Birse said, "that on the first Sabbath o' June month, and again on the third Sabbath, he poured out the Word grandly, but I've ta'en note this curran Sabbaths that if he's no michty magnificent he's michty poor. There's something damming up his mind, and when he gets by it he's a roaring water, but when he doesna he's a despisable trickle. The folk thinks it's a woman that's getting in his way, but diuna tell me that about sic a scholar; I tell you he would gang ower a toon o' women like a loaded cart ower new-laid stanes."

Wearyworld hobbled after me up the Roods one day, pelting me with remarks, though I was doing my best to get away from him. "Even Rob Dow sees there's something come ower the minister," he bawled, "for Rob's fou ilka Sabbath now. Ay, but this I will say for Mr. Dishart, that he aye gies me a civil word." I thought I had left the policeman behind with this, but next minute he roared, "and whatever is the matter wi' him it has made him kindlier

to me than ever." He must have taken the short cut through Lunan's close, for at the top of the Roods his voice again made up on me. "Dagon you, for a cruel pack to put your fingers to your lugs ilka time I open my mouth."

As for Waster Lumny's daughter Easie, who got her schooling free for redding up the schoolhouse and breaking my furniture, she would never have been off the gossip about the minister, for she was her mother in miniature, with a tongue that ran like a pump after the pans are full, not for use but for the mere pleasure of spilling.

On that awful fourth of August I not only had all this confused talk in my head but reason for jumping my mind between it and the Egyptian (as if to catch them together unawares), and I was like one who, with the mechanism of a watch jumbled in his hand, could set it going if he had the art.

Of the gypsy I knew nothing save what I had seen that night, yet what more was there

to learn? I was aware that she loved Gavin and that he loved her. A moment had shown it to me. Now with the Auld Lichts, I have the smith's acquaintance with his irons, and so I could not believe that they would suffer their minister to marry a vagrant. Had it not been for this knowledge, which made me fearful for Margaret, I would have done nothing to keep these two young people apart. Some to whom I have said this maintain that the Egyptian turned my head at our first meeting. Such an argument is not perhaps worth controverting. I admit that even now I straighten under the fire of a bright eye, as a pensioner may salute when he sees a young officer. In the shooting season, should I chance to be leaning over my dyke while English sportsmen pass (as is usually the case if I have seen them approaching), I remember nought of them save that they call me "she," and end their greetings with "whatever" (which Waster Lunny takes to be a southron mode

of speech), but their ladies dwell pleasantly in my memory, from their engaging faces to the pretty crumpled thing dangling on their arms, that is a hat or a basket, I am seldom sure which. The Egyptian's beauty, therefore, was a gladsome sight to me, and none the less so that I had come upon it as unexpectedly as some men step into a bog. Had she been alone when I met her I cannot deny that I would have been content to look on her face, without caring what was inside it; but she was with her lover, and that lover was Gavin, and so her face was to me as little for admiring as this glen in a thunderstorm, when I know that some fellow-creature is lost on the hills.

If, however, it was no quick liking for the gypsy that almost tempted me to leave these two lovers to each other, what was it? It was the warning of my own life. Adam Dishart had torn my arm from Margaret's, and I had not recovered the wrench in eighteen

years. Rather than act his part between these two I felt tempted to tell them, "Deplorable as the result may be, if you who are a minister marry this vagabond, it will be still more deplorable if you do not."

But there was Margaret to consider, and at thought of her I cursed the Egyptian aloud. What could I do to keep Gavin and the woman apart? I could tell him the secret of his mother's life. Would that be sufficient? It would if he loved Margaret, as I did not doubt. Pity for her would make him undergo any torture rather than she should suffer again. But to divulge our old connection would entail her discovery of me, and I questioned if even the saving of Gavin could destroy the bitterness of that.

I might appeal to the Egyptian. I might tell her even what I shuddered to tell him. She cared for him, I was sure, well enough to have the courage to give him up. But where was I to find her?

Were she and Gavin meeting still? Perhaps the change which had come over the little minister meant that they had parted. Yet what I had heard him say to her on the hill warned me not to trust in any such solution of the trouble.

Boys play at casting a humming-top into the midst of others on the ground, and if well aimed it scatters them prettily. I seemed to be playing such a game with my thoughts, for each new one sent the others here and there, and so what could I do in the end but fling my tops aside, and return to the heeling of my boot?

I was thus engaged when the sudden waking of the glen into life took me to my window. There is seldom silence up here, for if the wind be not sweeping the heather, the Quharity, that I may not have heard for days, seems to have crept nearer to the school-house in the night, and if both wind and water be out of earshot, there is the crack of a gun, or Waster Lunny's

shepherd is on a stone near at hand whistling, or a lamb is scrambling through a fence, and kicking foolishly with its hind legs. These sounds I am unaware of until they stop, when I look up. Such a stillness was broken now by music.

From my window I saw a string of people walking rapidly down the glen, and Waster Lunny crossing his potato-field to meet them. Remembering that, though I was in my stocking soles, the ground was dry, I hastened to join the farmer, for I like to miss nothing. I saw a curious sight. In front of the little procession coming down the glen road, and so much more impressive than his satellites that they may be put out of mind as merely ploughmen and the like following a show, was a Highlander that I knew to be Lauchlan Campbell, one of the pipers engaged to lend music to the earl's marriage. He had the name of a thrawn man when sober, but pretty at the pipes at both times, and he came marching down the glen blowing gloriously, as if he had the clan of Campbell at his heels.

I know no man who is so capable on occasion of looking like twenty as a Highland piper, and never have I seen a face in such a blaze of passion as was Lauchlan Campbell's that day. His following were keeping out of his reach, jumping back every time he turned round to shake his fist in the direction of the Spittal. While this magnificent man was yet some yards from us, I saw Waster Lunny, who had been in the middle of the road to ask questions, fall back in fear, and not being a fighting man myself, I jumped the dyke. Lauchlan gave me a look that sent me farther into the field, and strutted past, shrieking defiance through his pipes, until I lost him and his followers in a bend of the road.

"That's a terrifying spectacle," I heard Waster Lunny say when the music had become but a distant squeal. "You're bonny at louping dykes, dominie, when there is a wild bull in front o' you. Na, I canna tell what has happened, but at the least Lauchlan maun hae

dirked the earl. Thae loons cried out to me as they gaed by that he has been blawing awa' at that tune till he canna halt. What a wind's in the crittur! I'm thinking there's a hell in ilka Highlandman."

"Take care then, Waster Lunny, that you dinna licht it," said an angry voice that made us jump, though it was only Duncan, the farmer's shepherd, who spoke.

"I had forgotten you was a Highlandman yoursel', Duncan," Waster Lunny said nervously, but Elspeth, who had come to us unnoticed, ordered the shepherd to return to the hillside, which he did haughtily.

"How did you no lay haud on that blast o'wind, Lauchlan Campbell," asked Elspeth of her husband, "and speer at him what had happened at the Spittal? A quarrel afore a marriage brings ill luck."

"I'm thinking," said the farmer, "that Rintoul's making his ain ill luck by marrying on a young leddy."

"A man's never ower auld to marry," said Elspeth.

"No, nor a woman," rejoined Waster Lunny, "when she gets the chance. But, Elspeth, I believe I can guess what has fired that fearsome piper. Depend upon it, somebody has been speaking disrespectful about the crittur's ancestors."

"His ancestors!" exclaimed Elspeth, scornfully. "I'm thinking mine could hae bocht them at a crown the dozen."

"Hoots," said the farmer, "you're o' a weaving stock, and dinna understand about ancestors. Take a stick to a Highland laddie, and it's no him you hurt, but his ancestors. Likewise it's his ancestors that stanes you for it. When Duncan stalked awa the now, what think you he saw? He saw a farmer's wife dauring to order about his ancestors; and if that's the way wi' a shepherd, what will it be wi' a piper that has the kilts on him a' day to mind him o' his ancestors ilka time he looks down?"

Elspeth retired to discuss the probable disturbance at the Spittal with her family, giving Waster Lunny the opportunity of saying to me impressively—

"Man, man, has it never crossed you that it's a queer thing the like o' you and me having no ancestors? Ay, we had them in a manner o' speaking, no doubt, but they're as completely lost sicht o' as a flaggon lid that's fallen ahint the dresser. Heeh, sirs, but they would need a gey rubbing to get the rust off them now. I've been thinking that if I was to get my laddies to say their grandfather's name a curran times ilka day, like the Catechism, and they were to do the same wi' their bairns, and it was continued in future generations, we micht raise a fell field o' ancestors in time. Ay, but Elspeth wouldna hear o't. Nothing angers her mair than to hear me speak o' planting trees for the benefit o' them that's to be farmers here after me, and as for ancestors, she would howk them up as quick as I could plant

them. Losh, dominie, is that a boot in your hand?"

To my mortification I saw that I had run out of the school-house with the boot on my hand as if it were a glove, and back I went straightway, blaming myself for a man wanting in dignity. It was but a minor trouble this, however, even at the time; and to recall it later in the day was to look back on happiness, for though I did not know it yet, Lauchlan's playing raised the curtain on the great act of Gavin's life, and the twenty-four hours had begun, to which all I have told as yet is no more than the prologue.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SCENE AT THE SPITTAL.

Within an hour after I had left him, Waster Lunny walked into the school-house and handed me his snuff-mull, which I declined politely. It was with this ceremony that we usually opened our conversations.

"I've seen the post," he said, "and he tells me there has been a queer ploy at the Spittal. It's a wonder the marriage hasna been turned into a burial, and all because o' that Highland stirk, Lauchlan Campbell."

Waster Lunny was a man who had to retrace his steps in telling a story if he tried short cuts, and so my custom was to wait patiently while he delved through the ploughed fields that always lay between him and his destination.

"As you ken, Rintoul's so little o' a Scotchman that he's no muckle better than an

Englisher. That maun be the reason he hadna mair sense than to tramp on a Highlandman's ancestors, as he tried to tramp on Lauchlan's this day."

"If Lord Rintoul insulted the piper," I suggested, giving the farmer a helping hand cautiously, "it would be through inadvertence. Rintoul only bought the Spittal a year ago, and until then, I daresay, he had seldom been on our side of the border."

This was a foolish interruption, for it set Waster Lunny off in a new direction.

"That's what Elspeth says. Says she, 'When the earl has grand estates in England, what for does he come to a barren place like the Spittal to be married? It's gey like,' she says, 'as if he wanted the marriage to be got by quietly; a thing,' says she, 'that no woman can stand. Furthermore,' Elspeth says, 'how has the marriage been postponed twice?' We ken what the servants at the Spittal says to that, namely, that the young lady is no keen to take

him, but Elspeth winna listen to sic arguments. She says either the earl had grown timid (as mony a man does) when the wedding-day drew near, or else his sister that keeps his house is mad at the thocht o' losing her place; but as for the young leddy's being sweer, says Elspeth, 'an earl's an earl however auld he is, and a lassie's a lassie however young she is, and weel she kens you're never sure o' a man's no changing his mind about you till you're tied to him by law, after which it doesna so muckle matter whether he changes his mind about you or no.' Ay, there's a quirk in it some gait, dominie; but it's a deep water Elspeth canna bottom."

"It is," I agreed; "but you were to tell me what Birse told you of the disturbance at the Spittal."

"Ay, weel," he answered, "the post puts the wite o't on her little leddyship, as they call her, though she winna be a leddyship till the morn. All I can say is that if the earl was saft enough

to do sic a thing out o' fondness for her, it's time he was married on her, so that he may come to his senses again. That's what I say; but Elspeth conters me, of course, and says she, 'If the young leddy was so careless o' insulting other folks' ancestors, it proves she has nane o' her ain; for them that has china plates themsels is the maist careful no to break the china plates of others.'"

"But what was the insult? Was Lauchlan dismissed?"

"Na, faags! It was waur than that. Dominie, you're dull in the uptake compared to Elspeth. I hadna telled her half the story afore she jaloused the rest. However, to begin again; there's great feasting and rejoicings gaen on at the Spittal the now, and also a banquet, which the post says is twa dinners in one. Weel, there's a curran Ogilvys among the guests, and it was them that egged on her little leddyship to make the daring proposal to the earl. What was the proposal? It was no less

than that the twa pipers should be ordered to play 'The Bonny House o' Airlie.' Dominie, I wonder you can tak it so calm when you ken that's the Ogilvy's sang, and that it's aimed at the clan o' Campbell."

"Pooh!" I said. "The Ogilvys and the Campbells used to be mortal enemies, but the feud has been long forgotten."

"Ay, I've heard tell," Waster Lunny said sceptically, "that Airlie and Argyle shakes hands now like Christians; but I'm thinking that's just afore the Queen. Dinna speak now, for I'm in the thick o't. Her little leddyship was all hinging in gold and jewels, the which winna be her ain till the morn; and she leans ower to the earl and whispers to him to get the pipers to play 'The Bonny House.' He wasna willing, for says he, 'There's Ogilvys at the table, and ane o' the pipers is a Campbell, and we'll better let sleeping dogs lie.' However, the Ogilvys lauched at his caution; and he was so infatuated wi' her little leddyship that he gae in, and he

cried out to the pipers to strike up 'The Bonny House.'"

Waster Lunny pulled his chair nearer me and rested his hand on my knees.

"Dominie," he said in a voice that fell now and again into a whisper, "them looking on swears that when Lauchlan Campbell heard these monstrous orders his face became ugly and black, so that they kent in a jiffy what he would do. It's said a' body jumped back frae him in a sudden dread, except poor Angus, the other piper, wha was busy tuning up for 'The Bonny House.' Weel, Angus had got no farther in the tune than the first skirl when Lauchlan louped at him, and ripped up the startled crittur's pipes wi' his dirk. The pipes gae a roar o' agony like a stuck swine, and fell gasping on the floor. What happened next was that Lauchlan wi' his dirk handy for onybody that micht try to stop him, marched once round the table, playing 'The Campbells are coming,' and then straucht out o' the Spittal, his chest far afore him, and

his head so weel back that he could see what was going on ahint. Frae the Spittal to here he never stopped that fearsome tune, and I'se warrant he's blawing away at it at this moment through the streets o' Thrums."

Waster Lunny was not in his usual spirits, or he would have repeated his story before he left me, for he had usually as much difficulty in coming to an end as in finding a beginning. The drouth was to him as serious a matter as death in the house, and as little to be forgotten for a lengthened period.

"There's to be a prayer-meeting for rain in the Auld Licht kirk the night," he told me as I escorted him as far as my side of the Quharity, now almost a dead stream, pitiable to see, "and I'm gaen; though I'm sweer to leave thae puir cattle o' mine. You should see how they look at me when I gie them mair o' that rotten grass to eat. It's eneuch to mak a man greet, for what richt hae I to keep kye when I canna meat them?"

Waster Lunny has said to me more than once that the great surprise of his life was when Elspeth was willing to take him. Many a time, however, I have seen that in him which might have made any weaver's daughter proud of such a man, and I saw it again when we came to the river side.

"I'm no ane o' thae farmers," he said truthfully, "that's aye girding at the weather, and Elspeth and me kens that we hae been dealt wi' bountifully since we took this farm wi' gey anxious hearts. That woman, dominie, is eneuch to put a brave face on a coward, and it's no langer syne than yestreen when I was sitting in the dumps, looking at the aurora borealis, which I canna but regard as a messenger o' woe, that she put her hand on my shoulder, and she says, 'Waster Lunny, twenty year syne we began life thegither wi' nothing but the claethes on our back, and an it please God we can begin it again, for I hae you and you hae me, and I'm no cast down if you're no.'

Dominie, is there mony sic women in the warld as that?"

"Many a one," I said.

"Ay, man, it shamed me, for I hae a kind o' delight in angering Elspeth, just to see what she'll say. I could hae ta'en her on my knee at that minute, but the bairns was there, and so it wouldna hae dune. But I cheered her up, for, after all, the drouth canna put us so far back as we was twenty years syne, unless it's true what my father said, that the aurora borealis is the devil's rainbow. I saw it sax times in July month, and it made me shut my e'en. You was out admiring it, dominie, but I can never forget that it was seen in the year twelve just afore the great storm. I was only a laddie then, but I mind how that awful wind stripped a' the standing corn in the glen in less time than we've been here at the water's edge. It was called the deil's besom. My father's hinmost words to me was, 'It's time eneuch to greet, laddie, when you see the aurora borealis.' I

mind he was so complete ruined in an hour that he had to apply for relief frae the poor's rates. Think o' that, and him a proud man. He would tak' nothing till one winter day when we was a' starving, and syne I gaed wi' him to speir for't, and he telled me to grip his hand ticht, so that the cauldness o' mine micht gie him courage. They were doling out the charity in the Town's House, and I had never been in't afore. I canna look at it now without thinking o' that day when me and my father gaed up the stair thegither. Mr. Duthie was presiding at the time, and he wasna muckle older than Mr. Dishart is now. I mind he speired for proof that we was needing, and my father couldna speak. He just pointed at me. 'But you have a good coat on your back yoursel',' Mr. Duthie said, for there were mony waiting, sair needing. 'It was lended him to come here,' I cried, and without a word my father opened the coat, and they saw he had nothing on aneath, and his skin blue wi' cauld. Dominie,

Mr. Duthie handed him one shilling and saxpence, and my father's fingers closed greedily on't for a minute, and syne it fell to the ground. They put it back in his hand, and it slipped out again, and Mr. Duthie gave it back to him, saying, 'Are you so cauld as that?' But, oh, man, it wasna cauld that did it, but shame o' being on the rates. The blood a' ran to my father's head, and syne left it as quick, and he flung down the siller and walked out o' the Town's House wi' me running after him. We warstled through that winter, God kens how, and it's near a pleasure to me to think o't now, for, rain or no rain, I can never be reduced to sic straits again."

The farmer crossed the water without using the stilts which were no longer necessary, and I little thought, as I returned to the schoolhouse, what terrible things were to happen before he could offer me his snuff-mull again. Serious as his talk had been it was neither of drouth nor of the incident at the Spittal that

I sat down to think. My anxiety about Gavin came back to me until I was like a man imprisoned between walls of his own building. It may be that my presentiments of that afternoon look gloomier now than they were, because I cannot return to them save over a night of agony, black enough to darken any time connected with it. Perhaps my spirits only fell as the wind rose, for wind ever takes me back to Harvie, and when I think of Harvie my thoughts are of the saddest. I know that I sat for some hours, now seeing Gavin pay the penalty of marrying the Egyptian, and again drifting back to my days with Margaret, until the wind took to playing tricks with me, so that I heard Adam Dishart enter our home by the sea every time the school-house door shook.

I became used to the illusion after starting several times, and thus when the door did open, about seven o'clock, it was only the wind rushing to my fire like a shivering dog that made me turn my head. Then I saw the Egyptian

staring at me, and though her sudden appearance on my threshold was a strange thing, I forgot it in the whiteness of her face. She was looking at me like one who has asked a question of life or death, and stopped her heart for the reply.

"What is it?" I cried, and for a moment I believe I was glad she did not answer. She seemed to have told me already as much as I could bear.

"He has not heard," she said aloud in an expressionless voice, and, turning, would have slipped away without another word.

"Is any one dead?" I asked, seizing her hands and letting them fall, they were so clammy. She nodded, and trying to speak could not.

"He is dead," she said at last in a whisper. "Mr. Dishart is dead," and she sat down quietly.

At that I covered my face, crying, "God help Margaret!" and then she rose, saying

fiercely, so that I drew back from her, "There is no Margaret; he only cared for me."

"She is his mother," I said hoarsely, and then she smiled to me, so that I thought her a harmless mad thing. "He was killed by a piper called Lauchlan Campbell," she said, looking up at me suddenly. "It was my fault."

"Poor Margaret!" I wailed.

"And poor Babbie," she entreated pathetically; "will no one say, 'Poor Babbie'?"

CHAPTER XXVII.

FIRST JOURNEY OF THE DOMINIE TO THRUMS DURING THE TWENTY-FOUR HOURS.

"How did it happen?" I asked more than once, but the Egyptian was only with me in the body, and she did not hear. I might have been talking to some one a mile away whom a telescope had drawn near my eyes.

When I put on my bonnet, however, she knew that I was going to Thrums, and she rose and walked to the door, looking behind to see that I followed.

"You must not come," I said harshly, but her hand started to her heart as if I had shot her, and I added quickly, "Come." We were already some distance on our way before I repeated my question.

"What matter how it happened?" she answered piteously, and they were words of

which I felt the force. But when she said a little later, "I thought you would say it is not true," I took courage, and forced her to tell me all she knew. She sobbed while she spoke, if one may sob without tears.

"I heard of it at the Spittal," she said. "The news broke out suddenly there that the piper had quarrelled with some one in Thrums, and that in trying to separate them Mr. Dishart was stabbed. There is no doubt of its truth."

"We should have heard of it here," I said hopefully, "before the news reached the Spittal. It cannot be true."

"It was brought to the Spittal," she answered, "by the hill road."

Then my spirits sank again, for I knew that this was possible. There is a path, steep but short, across the hills between Thrums and the top of the glen, which Mr. Glendinning took frequently when he had to preach at both places on the same Sabbath. It is still called the Minister's Road.

"Yet if the earl had believed it he would have sent some one into Thrums for particulars," I said, grasping at such comfort as I could make.

"He does believe it," she answered. "He told me of it himself."

You see the Egyptian was careless of her secret now; but what was that secret to me? An hour ago it would have been much, and already it was not worth listening to. If she had begun to tell me why Lord Rintoul took a gypsy girl into his confidence I should not have heard her.

"I ran quickly," she said. "Even if a messenger was sent he might be behind me."

Was it her words or the tramp of a horse that made us turn our heads at that moment? I know not. But far back in a twist of the road we saw a horseman approaching at such a reckless pace that I thought he was on a runaway. We stopped instinctively, and waited for him, and twice he disappeared in hollows of the road,

and then was suddenly tearing down upon us. I recognised in him young Mr. McKenzie, a relative of Rintoul, and I stretched out my arms to compel him to draw up. He misunderstood my motive, and was raising his whip threateningly, when he saw the Egyptian. It is not too much to say that he swayed in the saddle. The horse galloped on, though he had lost hold of the reins. He looked behind until he rounded a corner, and I never saw such amazement mixed with incredulity on a human face. For some minutes I expected to see him coming back, but when he did not I said wonderingly to the Egyptian—

"He knew you."

"Did he?" she answered indifferently, and I think we spoke no more until we were in Windyghoul. Soon we were barely conscious of each other's presence. Never since have I walked between the school-house and Thrums in so short a time, nor seen so little on the way.

In the Egyptian's eyes, I suppose, was a

picture of Gavin lying dead; but if her grief had killed her thinking faculties, mine that was only less keen because I had been struck down once before, had set all the wheels of my brain in action. For it seemed to me that the hour had come when I must disclose myself to Margaret.

I had realised always that if such a necessity did arise it could only be caused by Gavin's premature death, or by his proving a bad son to her. Some may wonder that I could have looked calmly thus far into the possible, but I reply that the night of Adam Dishart's home-coming had made of me a man whom the future could not surprise again. Though I saw Gavin and his mother happy in our Auld Licht manse, that did not prevent my considering the contingencies which might leave her without a son. In the school-house I had brooded over them as one may think over moves on a draught-board. It may have been idle, but it was done that I might know how to act best for Margaret if anything untoward occurred. The time for such

action had come. Gavin's death had struck me hard, but it did not crush me. I was not unprepared. I was going to Margaret now.

What did I see as I walked quickly along the glen road, with Babbie silent by my side, and I doubt not pods of the broom cracking all around us? I saw myself entering the Auld Licht manse, where Margaret sat weeping over the body of Gavin, and there was none to break my coming to her, for none but she and I knew what had been.

I saw my Margaret again, so fragile now, so thin the wrists, her hair turned grey. No nearer could I go, but stopped at the door, grieving for her, and at last saying her name aloud.

I saw her raise her face, and look upon me for the first time for eighteen years. She did not scream at sight of me, for the body of her son lay between us, and bridged the gulf that Adam Dishart had made.

I saw myself draw near her reverently and

say, "Margaret, he is dead, and that is why I have come back," and I saw her put her arms around my neck as she often did long ago.

But it was not to be. Never since that night at Harvie have I spoken to Margaret.

The Egyptian and I were come to Windyghoul before I heard her speak. She was not addressing me. Here Gavin and she had met first, and she was talking of that meeting to herself.

"It was there," I heard her say softly, as she gazed at the bush beneath which she had seen him shaking his fist at her on the night of the riots. A little farther on she stopped where a path from Windyghoul sets off for the well in the wood. She looked up it wistfully, and there I left her behind, and pressed on to the mud house to ask Nanny Webster if the minister was dead. Nanny's gate was swinging in the wind, but her door was shut, and for a moment I stood at it like a coward, afraid to enter and hear the worst.

The house was empty. I turned from it relieved, as if I had got a respite, and while I stood in the garden the Egyptian came to me shuddering, her twitching face asking the question that would not leave her lips.

"There is no one in the house," I said. "Nanny is perhaps at the well."

But the gypsy went inside, and pointing to the fire said, "It has been out for hours. Do you not see? The murder has drawn every one into Thrums."

So I feared. A dreadful night was to pass before I knew that this was the day of the release of Sanders Webster, and that frail Nanny had walked into Tilliedrum to meet him at the prison gate.

Babbie sank upon a stool, so weak that I doubt whether she heard me tell her to wait there until my return. I hurried into Thrums, not by the hill, though it is the shorter way, but by the Roods, for I must hear all before I ventured to approach the manse. From Windyghoul

to the top of the Roods it is a climb and then a steep descent. The road has no sooner reached its highest point than it begins to fall in the straight line of houses called the Roods, and thus I came upon a full view of the street at once. A cart was labouring up it. There were women sitting on stones at their doors, and girls playing at palaulays, and out of the house nearest me came a black figure. My eyes failed me; I was asking so much from them. They made him tall and short, and spare and stout, so that I knew it was Gavin, and yet, looking again, feared, but all the time, I think, I knew it was he.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE HILL BEFORE DARKNESS FELL—SCENE OF THE IMPENDING CATASTROPHE.

"You are better now?" I heard Gavin ask, presently.

He thought that having been taken ill suddenly I had waved to him for help because he chanced to be near. With all my wits about me I might have left him in that belief, for rather would I have deceived him than had him wonder why his welfare seemed so vital to me. But I, who thought the capacity for being taken aback had gone from me, clung to his arm and thanked God audibly that he still lived. He did not tell me then how my agitation puzzled him, but led me kindly to the hill, where we could talk without listeners. By the time we reached it I was again wary, and I had told him what had brought me to Thrums, without

mentioning how the story of his death reached my ears, or through whom.

"Mr. McKenzie," he said, interrupting me, "galloped all the way from the Spittal on the same errand. However, no one has been hurt much, except the piper himself."

Then he told me how the rumour arose.

"You know of the incident at the Spittal, and that Campbell marched off in high dudgeon? I understand that he spoke to no one between the Spittal and Thrums, but by the time he arrived here he was more communicative; yes, and thirstier. He was treated to drink in several public-houses by persons who wanted to hear his story, and by and by he began to drop hints of knowing something against the earl's bride. Do you know Rob Dow?"

"Yes," I answered, "and what you have done for him."

"Ah, sir!" he said, sighing, "for a long time I thought I was to be God's instrument in making a better man of Rob, but my power over

him went long ago. Ten short months of the ministry takes some of the vanity out of a man."

Looking sideways at him I was startled by the unnatural brightness of his eyes. Unconsciously he had acquired the habit of pressing his teeth together in the pauses of his talk, shutting them on some woe that would proclaim itself, as men do who keep their misery to themselves.

"A few hours ago," he went on, "I heard Rob's voice in altercation as I passed the Bull tavern, and I had a feeling that if I failed with him so should I fail always throughout my ministry. I walked into the public-house, and stopped at the door of a room in which Dow and the piper were sitting drinking. I heard Rob saying, fiercely, 'If what you say about her is true, Highlandman, she's the woman I've been looking for this half year and mair; what is she like?' I guessed, from what I had been told of the piper, that they were speaking of the earl's bride, but Rob saw me and came to an abrupt stop, saying to his companion, 'Dinna

say another word about her afore the minister.' Rob would have come away at once in answer to my appeal, but the piper was drunk and would not be silenced. 'I'll tell the minister about her, too,' he began. 'You dinna ken what you're doing,' Rob roared, and then, as if to save my ears from scandal at any cost, he struck Campbell a heavy blow on the mouth. I tried to intercept the blow, with the result that I fell, and then some one ran out of the tavern crying, 'He's killed!' The piper had been stunned, but the story went abroad that he had stabbed me for interfering with him. That is really all. Nothing, as you know, can overtake an untruth if it has a minute's start."

"Where is Campbell now?"

"Sleeping off the effect of the blow: but Dow has fled. He was terrified at the shouts of murder, and ran off up the West Town end. The doctor's dog-cart was standing at a door there and Rob jumped into it and drove off. They did not chase him far, because he is sure

to hear the truth soon, and then, doubtless, he will come back."

Though in a few hours we were to wonder at our denseness, neither Gavin nor I saw why Dow had struck the Highlander down rather than let him tell his story in the minister's presence. One moment's suspicion would have lit our way to the whole truth, but of the spring to all Rob's behaviour in the past eight months we were ignorant, and so to Gavin the Bull had only been the scene of a drunken brawl, while I forgot to think in the joy of finding him alive.

"I have a prayer-meeting for rain presently," Gavin said, breaking a picture that had just appeared unpleasantly before me of Babbie still in agony at Nanny's, "but before I leave you tell me why this rumour caused you such distress."

The question troubled me, and I tried to avoid it. Crossing the hill we had by this time drawn near a hollow called the Toad's-hole, then gay and noisy with a caravan of gypsies.

They were those same wild Lindsays, for whom Gavin had searched Caddam one eventful night, and as I saw them crowding round their king, a man well known to me, I guessed what they were at.

"Mr. Dishart," I said abruptly, "would you like to see a gypsy marriage? One is taking place there just now. That big fellow is the king, and he is about to marry two of his people over the tongs. The ceremony will not detain us five minutes, though the rejoicings will go on all night."

I have been present at more than one gypsy wedding in my time, and at the wild, weird orgies that followed them, but what is interesting to such as I may not be for a minister's eyes, and, frowning at my proposal, Gavin turned his back upon the Toad's-hole. Then, as we recrossed the hill, to get away from the din of the camp, I pointed out to him that the report of his death had brought McKenzie to Thrums, as well as me.

"As soon as McKenzie heard I was not dead," he answered, "he galloped off to the Spittal, without even seeing me. I suppose he posted back to be in time for the night's rejoicings there. So you see, it was not solicitude for me that brought him. He came because a servant at the Spittal was supposed to have done the deed."

"Well, Mr. Dishart," I had to say, "why should I deny that I have a warm regard for you? You have done brave work in our town."

"It has been little," he replied. "With God's help it will be more in future."

He meant that he had given time to his sad love affair that he owed to his people. Of seeing Babbie again I saw that he had given up hope. Instead of repining, he was devoting his whole soul to God's work. I was proud of him, and yet I grieved, for I could not think that God wanted him to bury his youth so soon.

"I had thought," he confessed to me, "that you were one of those who did not like my preaching."

"You were mistaken," I said, gravely. I dared not tell him that, except his mother, none would have sat under him so eagerly as I.

"Nevertheless," he said, "you were a member of the Auld Licht church in Mr. Carfrae's time, and you left it when I came."

"I heard your first sermon," I said.

"Ah," he replied. "I had not been long in Thrums before I discovered that if I took tea with any of my congregation and declined a second cup, they thought it a reflection on their brewing."

"You must not look upon my absence in that light," was all I could say. "There are reasons why I cannot come."

He did not press me further, thinking I meant that the distance was too great, though frailer folk than I walked twenty miles to

hear him. We might have parted thus had we not wandered by chance to the very spot where I had met him and Babbie. There is a seat there now for those who lose their breath on the climb up, and so I have two reasons nowadays for not passing the place by.

We read each other's thoughts, and Gavin said calmly, "I have not seen her since that night. She disappeared as into a grave."

How could I answer when I knew that Babbie was dying for want of him, not half a mile away?

"You seemed to understand everything that night," he went on; "or if you did not, your thoughts were very generous to me."

In my sorrow for him I did not notice that we were moving on again, this time in the direction of Windyghoul.

"She was only a gypsy girl," he said, abruptly, and I nodded. "But I hoped," he continued, "that she would be my wife."

"I understood that," I said.

"There was nothing monstrous to you," he asked, looking me in the face, "in a minister's marrying a gypsy?"

I own that if I had loved a girl, however far below or above me in degree, I would have married her had she been willing to take me. But to Gavin I only answered, "These are matters a man must decide for himself."

"I had decided for myself," he said, emphatically.

"Yet," I said, wanting him to talk to me of Margaret, "in such a case one might have others to consider besides himself."

"A man's marriage," he answered, "is his own affair. I would have brooked no interference from my congregation."

I thought, "There is some obstinacy left in him still;" but aloud I said, "It was of your mother I was thinking."

"She would have taken Babbie to her heart," he said, with the fond conviction of a lover.

I doubted it, but I only asked, "Your mother knows nothing of her?"

"Nothing," he rejoined. "It would be cruelty to tell my mother of her now that she is gone."

Gavin's calmness had left him, and he was striding quickly nearer to Windyghoul. I was in dread lest he should see the Egyptian at Nanny's door, yet to have turned him in another direction might have roused his suspicions. When we were within a hundred yards of the mud house, I knew that there was no Babbie in sight. We halved the distance and then I saw her at the open window. Gavin's eyes were on the ground, but she saw him. I held my breath, fearing that she would run out to him.

"You have never seen her since that night?" Gavin asked me, without hope in his voice.

Had he been less hopeless he would have wondered why I did not reply immediately. I

was looking covertly at the mud house, of which we were now within a few yards. Babbie's face had gone from the window, and the door remained shut. That she could hear every word we uttered now, I could not doubt. But she was hiding from the man for whom her soul longed. She was sacrificing herself for him.

"Never," I answered, notwithstanding my pity for the brave girl, and then while I was shaking lest he should go in to visit Nanny, I heard the echo of the Auld Licht bell.

"That calls me to the meeting for rain," Gavin said, bidding me good-night. I had acted for Margaret, and yet I had hardly the effrontery to take his hand. I suppose he saw sympathy in my face, for suddenly the cry broke from him—

"If I could only know that nothing evil had befallen her!"

Babbie heard him and could not restrain a heart-breaking sob.

"What was that?" he said, starting.

A moment I waited, to let her show herself if she chose. But the mud house was silent again.

"It was some boy in the wood," I answered.

"Good-bye," he said, trying to smile.

Had I let him go, here would have been the end of his love story, but that piteous smile unmanned me, and I could not keep the words back.

"She is in Nanny's house," I cried.

In another moment these two were together for weal or woe, and I had set off dizzily for the school-house, feeling now that I had been false to Margaret, and again exulting in what I had done. By and by the bell stopped, and Gavin and Babbie regarded it as little as I heeded the burns now crossing the glen road noisily at places that had been dry two hours before.

CHAPTER XXIX.

STORY OF THE EGYPTIAN.

God gives us more than, were we not overbold, we should dare to ask for, and yet how often (perhaps after saying "Thank God" so curtly that it is only a form of swearing) we are suppliants again within the hour. Gavin was to be satisfied if he were told that no evil had befallen her he loved, and all the way between the school-house and Windyghoul Babbie craved for no more than Gavin's life. Now they had got their desires; but do you think they were content?

The Egyptian had gone on her knees when she heard Gavin speak of her. It was her way of preventing herself from running to him. Then when she thought him gone, he opened the door. She rose and shrank back, but first she had stepped toward him with a glad cry. His disappointed arms met on nothing.

"You, too, heard that I was dead?" he said, thinking her strangeness but grief too sharply turned to joy.

There were tears in the word with which she answered him, and he would have kissed her, but she defended her face with her hand.

"Babbie," he asked, beginning to fear that he had not sounded her deepest woe, "why have you left me all this time? You are not glad to see me now?"

"I was glad," she answered in a low voice, "to see you from the window, but I prayed to God not to let you see me."

She even pulled away her hand when he would have taken it. "No, no, I am to tell you everything now, and then——"

"Say that you love me first," he broke in, when a sob checked her speaking.

"No," she said, "I must tell you first what I have done, and then you will not ask me to say that. I am not a gypsy."

"What of that?" cried Gavin. "It was not because you were a gypsy that I loved you."

"That is the last time you will say you love me," said Babbie. "Mr. Dishart, I am to be married to-morrow."

She stopped, afraid to say more lest he should fall, but except that his arms twitched he did not move.

"I am to be married to Lord Rintoul," she went on. "Now you know who I am."

She turned from him, for his piercing eyes frightened her. Never again, she knew, would she see the love-light in them. He plucked himself from the spot where he had stood looking at her, and walked to the window. When he wheeled round there was no anger on his face, only a pathetic wonder that he had been deceived so easily. It was at himself that he was smiling grimly rather than at her, and the change pained Babbie as no words could have hurt her. He sat down on a chair, and waited for her to go on.

"Don't look at me," she said, "and I will tell you everything." He dropped his eyes listlessly, and had he not asked her a question from time to time she would have doubted whether he heard her.

"After all," she said, "a gypsy dress is my birthright, and so the Thrums people were scarcely wrong in calling me an Egyptian. It is a pity any one insisted on making me something different. I believe I could have been a good gypsy."

"Who were your parents?" Gavin asked, without looking up.

"You ask that," she said, "because you have a good mother. It is not a question that would occur to me. My mother—— If she was bad may not that be some excuse for me? Ah, but I have no wish to excuse myself. Have you seen a gypsy cart with a sort of hammock swung beneath it in which gypsy children are carried about the country? If there are no children, the pots and pans are

stored in it. Unless the roads are rough it makes a comfortable cradle, and it was the only one I ever knew. Well, one day I suppose the road was rough, for I was capsized. I remember picking myself up after a little and running after the cart, but they did not hear my cries. I sat down by the roadside and stared after the cart until I lost sight of it. That was in England, and I was not three years old."

"But surely," Gavin said, "they came back to look for you?"

"So far as I know," Babbie answered hardly, "they did not come back. I have never seen them since. I think they were drunk. My only recollection of my mother is that she once took me to see the dead body of some gypsy who had been murdered. She told me to dip my hand in the blood, so that I could say I had done so when I became a woman. It was meant as a treat to me, and is the one kindness I am sure I got from her. Curiously enough, I felt the shame of her deserting me

for many years afterwards. As a child I cried hysterically at thought of it; it pained me when I was at school in Edinburgh every time I saw the other girls writing home; I cannot think of it without a shudder, even now. It is what makes me worse than other women."

Her voice had altered, and she was speaking passionately.

"Sometimes," she continued, more gently, "I try to think that my mother did come back for me, and then went away because she heard I was in better hands than hers. It was Lord Rintoul who found me, and I owe everything to him. You will say that he has no need to be proud of me. He took me home on his horse, and paid his gardener's wife to rear me. She was Scotch, and that is why I can speak two languages. It was he, too, who sent me to school in Edinburgh."

"He has been very kind to you," said Gavin, who would have preferred to dislike the earl.

"So kind," answered Babbie, "that now he is to marry me. But do you know why he has done all this?"

Now again she was agitated, and spoke indignantly.

"It is all because I have a pretty face," she said, her bosom rising and falling. "Men think of nothing else. He had no pity for the deserted child. I knew that while I was yet on his horse. When he came to the gardener's afterwards it was not to give me some one to love, it was only to look upon what was called my beauty; I was merely a picture to him, and even the gardener's children knew it and sought to terrify me by saying, 'You are losing your looks; the earl will not care for you any more.' Sometimes he brought his friends to see me, 'because I was such a lovely child,' and if they did not agree with him on that point he left without kissing me. Throughout my whole girlhood I was taught nothing but to please him, and

the only way to do that was to be pretty. It was the only virtue worth striving for; the others were never thought of when he asked how I was getting on. Once I had fever and nearly died, yet this knowledge that my face was everything was implanted in me so that my fear lest he should think me ugly when I recovered terrified me into hysterics. I dream still that I am in that fever and all my fears return. He did think me ugly when he saw me next. I remember the incident so well still. I had run to him, and he was lifting me up to kiss me when he saw that my face had changed. 'What a cruel disappointment,' he said, and turned his back on me. I had given him a child's love until then, but from that day I was hard and callous."

"And when was it you became beautiful again?" Gavin asked, by no means in the mind to pay compliments.

"A year passed," she continued, "before I

saw him again. In that time he had not asked for me once, and the gardener had kept me out of charity. It was by an accident that we met, and at first he did not know me. Then he said, 'Why, Babbie, I believe you are to be a beauty after all!' I hated him for that, and stalked away from him, but he called after me, 'Bravo! she walks like a queen;' and it was because I walked like a queen that he sent me to an Edinburgh school. He used to come to see me every year, and as I grew up the girls called me Lady Rintoul. He was not fond of me; he is not fond of me now. He would as soon think of looking at the back of a picture as at what I am apart from my face, but he dotes on it, and is to marry it. Is that love? Long before I left school, which was shortly before you came to Thrums, he had told his sister that he was determined to marry me, and she hated me for it, making me as uncomfortable as she could, so that I almost looked forward to the marriage because it would be such a humiliation to her."

In admitting this she looked shamefacedly at Gavin, and then went on—

"It is humiliating him too. I understand him. He would like not to want to marry me, for he is ashamed of my origin, but he cannot help it. It is this feeling that has brought him here, so that the marriage may take place where my history is not known."

"The secret has been well kept," Gavin said, "for they have failed to discover it even in Thrums."

"Some of the Spittal servants suspect it, nevertheless," Babbie answered, "though how much they know I cannot say. He has not a servant now, either here or in England, who knew me as a child. The gardener who befriended me was sent away long ago. Lord Rintoul looks upon me as a disgrace to him that he cannot live without."

"I dare say he cares for you more than you think," Gavin said gravely.

"He is infatuated about my face, or the pose

of my head, or something of that sort," Babbie said bitterly, "or he would not have endured me so long. I have twice had the wedding postponed, chiefly, I believe, to enrage my natural enemy, his sister, who is as much aggravated by my reluctance to marry him as by his desire to marry me. However, I also felt that imprisonment for life was approaching as the day drew near, and I told him that if he did not defer the wedding I should run away. He knows I am capable of it, for twice I ran away from school. If his sister only knew that!"

For a moment it was the old Babbie Gavin saw; but her glee was short-lived, and she resumed sedately—

"They were kind to me at school, but the life was so dull and prim that I ran off in a gypsy dress of my own making. That is what it is to have gypsy blood in one. I was away for a week the first time, wandering the country alone, telling fortunes, dancing and singing in woods and sleeping in barns. I am the only

woman in the world well brought up who is not afraid of mice or rats. That is my gypsy blood again. After that wild week I went back to the school of my own will, and no one knows of the escapade but my school-mistress and Lord Rintoul. The second time, however, I was detected singing in the street, and then my future husband was asked to take me away. Yet Miss Feversham cried when I left, and told me that I was the nicest girl she knew, as well as the nastiest. She said she should love me as soon as I was not one of her boarders."

"And then you came to the Spittal?"

"Yes; and Lord Rintoul wanted me to say I was sorry for what I had done, but I told him I need not say that, for I was sure to do it again. As you know, I have done it several times since then; and though I am a different woman since I knew you, I dare say I shall go on doing it at times all my life. You shake your head because you do not understand. It is not that I make up my mind to break out in

that way ; I may not have had the least desire to do it for weeks, and then suddenly, when I am out riding, or at dinner, or at a dance, the craving to be a gypsy again is so strong that I never think of resisting it ; I would risk my life to gratify it. Yes, whatever my life in the future is to be, I know that must be part of it. I used to pretend at the Spittal that I had gone to bed, and then escape by the window. I was mad with glee at those times, but I always returned before morning, except once, the last time I saw you, when I was away for nearly twenty-four hours. Lord Rintoul was so glad to see me come back then, that he almost forgave me for going away. There is nothing more to tell except that on the night of the riot it was not my gypsy nature that brought me to Thrums, but a desire to save the poor weavers. I had heard Lord Rintoul and the sheriff discussing the contemplated raid. I have hidden nothing from you. In time, perhaps, I shall have suffered sufficiently for all my wickedness."

Gavin rose wearedly, and walked through the mud house looking at her.

"This is the end of it all," he said harshly, coming to a standstill. "I loved you Babbie."

"No," she answered, shaking her head. "You never knew me until now, and so it was not me you loved. I know what you thought I was, and I will try to be it now."

"If you had only told me this before," the minister said sadly, "it might not have been too late."

"I only thought you like all the other men I knew," she replied, "until the night I came to the manse. It was only my face you admired at first."

"No, it was never that," Gavin said with such conviction that her mouth opened in alarm to ask him if he did not think her pretty. She did not speak, however, and he continued, "You must have known that I loved you from the first night."

"No; you only amused me," she said,

like one determined to stint nothing of the truth. "Even at the well I laughed at your vows."

This wounded Gavin afresh, wretched as her story had made him, and he said tragically, "You have never cared for me at all."

"Oh, always, always," she answered, "since I knew what love was; and it was you who taught me."

Even in his misery he held his head high with pride. At least she did love him.

"And then," Babbie said, hiding her face, "I could not tell you what I was because I knew you would loathe me. I could only go away."

She looked at him forlornly through her tears, and then moved toward the door. He had sunk upon a stool, his face resting on the table, and it was her intention to slip away unnoticed. But he heard the latch rise, and jumping up, said sharply, "Babbie, I cannot give you up."

She stood in tears, swinging the door unconsciously with her hand.

"Don't say that you love me still," she cried; and then, letting her hand fall from the door, added imploringly, "Oh, Gavin, do you?"

END OF VOL. II.

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